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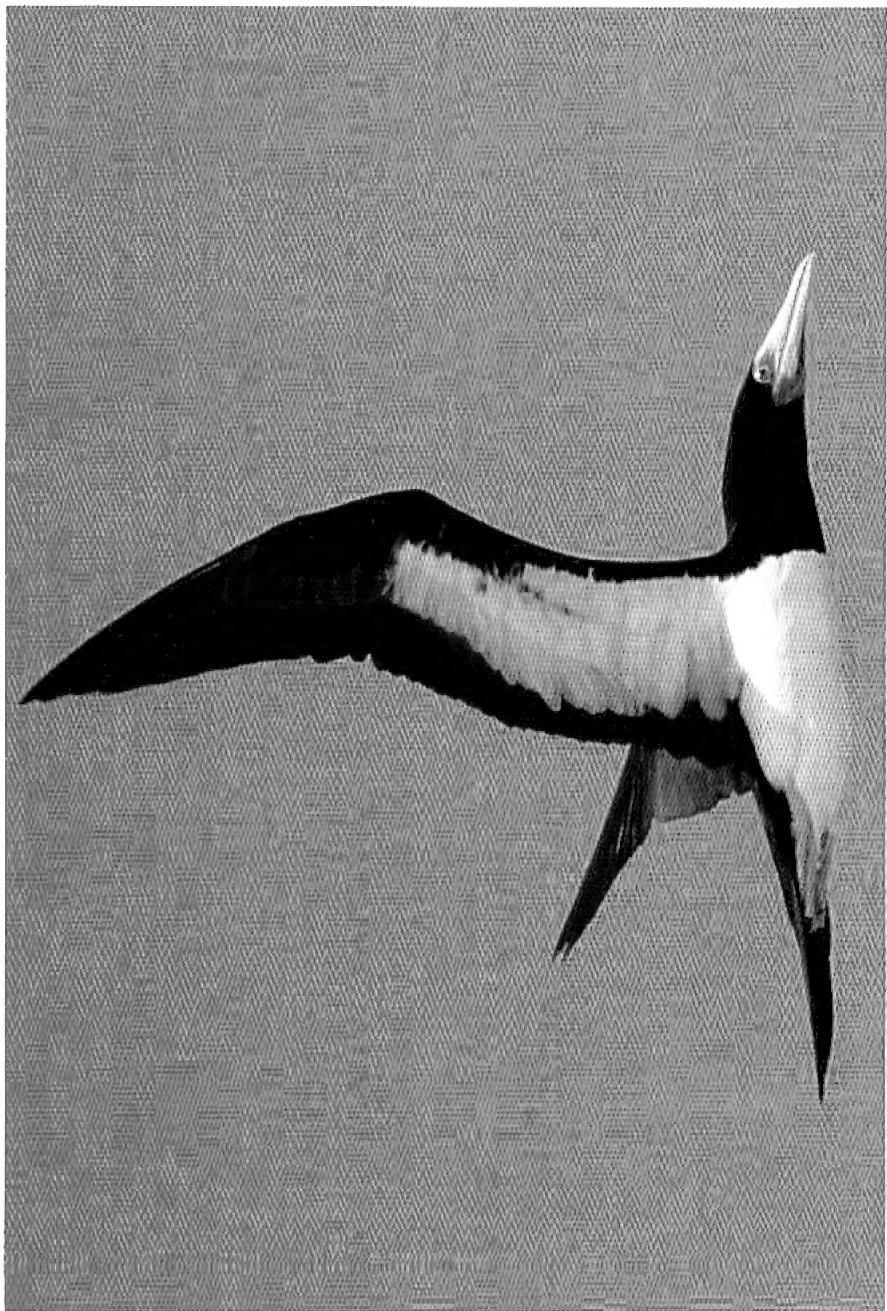


# Sea Swallow

Annual Report of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society



£12 (US\$25)



Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*, Diego Garcia Nov 2007. Photograph: Chris Patrick.

## OFFICERS OF THE ROYAL NAVAL BIRDWATCHING SOCIETY

(Registered Charity No. 207619)

[www.rnbws.org.uk](http://www.rnbws.org.uk)

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**Aims and Activities:** The primary aim of the Society is to promote a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and of landbirds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare-time recreation and hobby. The secondary aim is to co-ordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist ashore. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, usually in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

**Membership:** has been widened from the RN to include those, regardless of nationality, who share a common background of the sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society Website and at the back of *Sea Swallow*.

**Subscription rates:** Full and associate members £12 annually. Due 1 January.

Library rates: Cost of *Sea Swallow*, (£10) plus postage.

**RNBWS Record Forms** - can be found on the Society Website at [www.rnbws.org.uk](http://www.rnbws.org.uk). Completed forms should be sent to the Gen Sec or Editor of SS for onward transmission.

**Material for publication** in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the Editor. Instructions to authors can be found towards the back.

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## PRESIDENT'S FOREWORD

First of all our congratulations to our Chairman who has been promoted to Rear Admiral and appointed as Flag Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are grateful that he has agreed to continue as Chairman. You will be sad to hear of the death of Captain Peter Chilman who died in April after a short illness. Peter was our Merchant Navy Vice Chairman for many years and was a most active member of the society, with prolific contributions to our seabird database between 1957 and 1983 when he was operating Shell Tankers in the Far East.

I am pleased to report that our professional profile remains high, with two articles in the forthcoming 2008 edition of *Sanctuary* (the conservation journal of the Defence Estates) and an article in the Spring edition of *Seafarers UK* magazine *Flagship*. We were also able to publicise the Society whilst helping out on the UKOTCF stand at this year's British Birdwatching Fair. It is also good to see that we have been able to award 4 Simpson Scholarships this year.

*Sea Swallow* and our Bulletin continue to be popular. This edition of *Sea Swallow* encapsulates all the work that has been done to investigate the birds of Diego Garcia and its surrounding islands. Led by Major Peter Carr Royal Marines the work is a major contribution to the ornithological knowledge of the area. Next year we expect to focus on the Brazilian seaboard with articles from our Brazilian rep Caio Carlos and his colleagues.

However, despite this encouraging report, we remain very low on recruiting - to put it bluntly, we need new blood. Our sister organisations AOS and RAFOS have the same problem, and of course we work closely together, but I encourage all RNBWS members to fly the recruitment banner. Let us aim for at least 10 new members in 09!

David Dobson

## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

Once again a steady year but with the cancellation of many programmed outings due to lack of support. The spring visit to Portland was well supported and members continue to meet in their local areas. Workload has detracted from the activities of our committee: Mark Cutts was posted to Afghanistan earlier in the year and will not return until December; Frank Ward has moved from the civil service and is now the Dep Gen Sec of the Royal Naval Association, resulting in the delay of the mid-year Bulletin; and Pete Carr has been hard at work with the final part of his MSc and his preps for his appointment to Diego Garcia in November for a year. We have yet to finalise our programme for next year but we are definitely planning a trip to Gibraltar at the time of the spring migration at the end of April. Our plans for an expedition to the Pitcairn Islands have stalled for the time being until we receive more information from the RSPB on their overseas territories work programme.

Our President has mentioned *Sea Swallow* - it is interesting to note that recent Satellite tracking of Pallid Harriers has now shown the route between their breeding in N Kazakhstan and wintering in S Sudan does indeed take them over the Caspian Sea; this was reported by Stewart Hingston in SS48:32 and SS54:48; illustrating well I think the great contribution that can be made by the non-professional observer.

I hope that in 2009 we can get more of our members to take part in our group activities, we are all very busy people, but the commitment to take part in just one event during the year would make the world of difference.

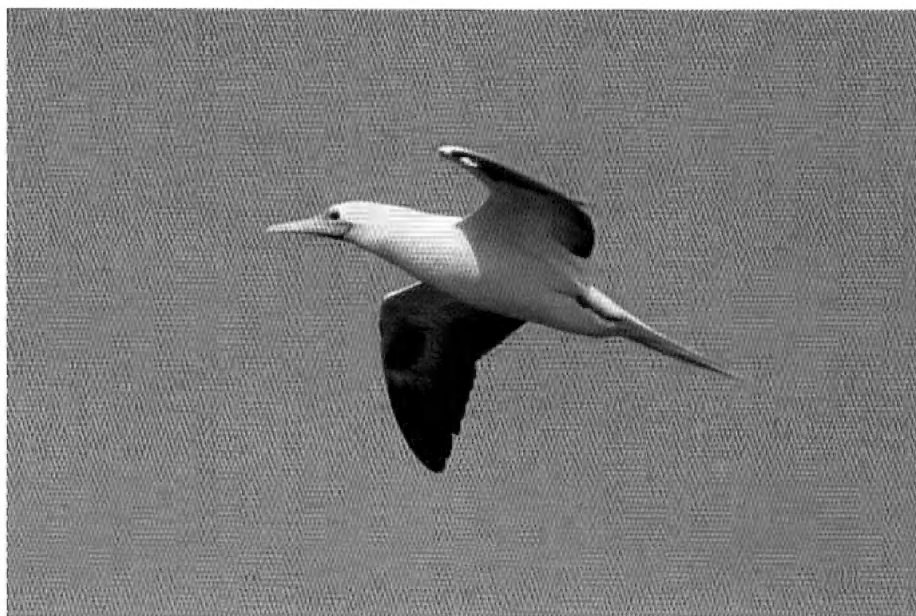
Martin Alabaster

## EDITORIAL

*Sea Swallow* 57 continues the tradition of providing a mix of articles to suit all tastes. The Society's link with the Chagos archipelago strengthens and the bulk of this issue is taken up with the report from the expedition in November last year. This built on the successes of the 2005 expedition and continues to add knowledge of the natural history of the islands I welcome Simon Cook as a new contributor and his mix of articles taken from his time as a resident expert on various trips are a welcome addition.

This was to be my last edition of *Sea Swallow* before handing over to Pete Carr, but I have agreed to stay for one further publication in order to manage the transition of editors, and because Pete will be serving on Diego Garcia for most of next year. As ever, I repeat the request for articles and records to ensure that we remain able to publish a meaningful journal.

Gary Lewis



Red-footed Booby, *Sula sula*, 12.6S 150.7E, Coral Sea, 17 August 2007.  
Adult white phase. Photo: Neil Cheshire.

## NOTES ON SEABIRD REPORTS RECEIVED 2007-2008

by Neil Cheshire

Contributions are again at a modest level this year. Thomas Johannsen sent notes of interesting observations in the Pacific region. Simon Cook was an ornithological guide and lecturer aboard an expedition ship sailing around the Atlantic and Caribbean and has generously sent us his records. Stephen Chapman sent detailed notes of his now annual voyage in a sail training ship. I have included some of my own observations from a recent voyage in the South-west Pacific. All observers are thanked for their participation.

Stephen Chapman                      s.t.s *Tenacious*. Southampton - Leixoes - Canary Is.-Tenerife,  
Oct 2007. 8C.

Neil G. Cheshire *r.v. Southern Surveyor: Noumea-Fijian and Tongan waters-Apia-Suva-Suva, May-June 2008, 32C.*

Simon Cook                      m.v.*Fram*. Iceland-Hebrides-S.Ireland-St. Johns,  
Newfoundland-Gulf of St. Lawrence-Bar Hr.-Martha's  
Vineyard-Newport-New York-C.Hatteras area-  
Charleston-Jacksonville-Key West-Belize-  
Guatamala-Honduras-Puerto Limon, Costa  
Rica. 4 Summary sheets.

Capt. Thomas Johannsen MN m.v. *Lily Oldendorff*. Vancouver-Niihama Japan, April 2007, 4C  
m.v. *Carl Oldendorff*. Burnie, Tasmania- Haiphong-Bunbury, WA-China, Jan-April 2008, 2C

Observers are referred to by their initials. Dates refer to 2007 unless otherwise listed. Positions are given in degrees and decimals of degrees of latitude and longitude. nm = nautical miles (1.852 km). Ad = Adult, h = hours, imm = immature.

ALBATROSSES *Diomedidae*

**Black-footed Albatross** *Diomedea nigripes*. During a North Pacific crossing from Vancouver to Japan, TJ recorded one at 45.8N 129.9W on 10 April, one at 40.6N 139.1W on 12 April, one at 37.1N 144.2W on 13 April, two at 36.0N 148.6W on 14 April, two at 33.0N 154.8W on 15 April, one at 33.0N 160.9W on 16 April, one at 30.0N 179.4W on 19 April and the last two at 30.0N 179.9E on 20 April, all observations within the normal spring range of the species.

**Laysan Albatross** *Diomedea immutabilis*. One was seen by TJ in the eastern North Pacific at 34N 148.6W on 14 April, two the next day at 33N 154.7W, five at 32.6N 167.1W on 17 April and six at 30.4N 173.0W on 18 April.

**FULMARS *Fulmarinae***

**Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*.** SCosaw 'hundreds' at 63.4N 20.5W near the Westmann Islands, southern Iceland on 19 Sept, 35 in mid Atlantic at 49.5N 29.5W on 28 Sept, six at 48.8N 38W the next day, 300 at 48.1N 45.4W on 30 Sept, six off St. John's, Newfoundland on 1 Oct and 20 at 44.4N 68.2W near Bar Harbor, Maine on 5 Oct.

**Cape Petrel *Daption capense*.** TJ recorded 30 at Bunbury Roads on 14 Mar'08, 100 at 26.3S 112.8E off Shark Bay W.A. on 20 Mar and 50 at 21S 113.5E off NW Cape, W.A. on 21 Mar'08. These are unusually large numbers this far north and for early autumn in Western Australian waters.

**Tahiti Petrel *Pseudobulweria rostrata*.** Two singles at 22.3S 167.1E and 22.3S 167.3E off SE New Caledonia on 30 April'08. In Fijian waters one was seen at 17.4S 179.9E on 6 May'08 and singles at 18.2S 178.5E and 17.7S 179.3E on 27 May'08.(NGC)

**Beck's Petrel *Pseudobulweria becki*.** Hadoram Shirihai made an exciting rediscovery of this species off the south coast of New Ireland PNG in August 2007. It was previously known only from two specimens obtained eighty years ago by Rollo Beck. (Shirihai 2008)

**Herald Petrel *Pterodroma arminjoniana*.** Good views of a pale phase bird east of Fiji at 17.5S 176.8W on 4 June'08. A medium to large *pterodroma* with greyish brown upperparts, white chin and throat, diffused brown breast band, lower breast and belly white. Underwing brown with whitish patch on primaries narrowing to extend along secondaries towards body (NGC).

**Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*.** Singles at 15.4S 175.7W and 15.4S 175.6W near the outlying Tongan Island of Nuia Fo'ou on 16 May'08, one at 15.5S 177.2W on 21 May'08 and one at 17.3S 176.4W on 5 June'08. One came aboard at night during heavy rain at 17.7S 176.6W (see photograph). When released the next day it climbed to about 100 metres above the sea, circled three times before flying away.(NGC)



Black-winged Petrel *Pterodroma nigripennis*, 17.7S 176.6W, east of Fiji, 4 June 2008.

Photograph: Neil Cheshire

**Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*.** SCo had close views of 6-8 birds in 1.5 h at 35.6N 74.6W c. 60 nm ENE from Cape Hatteras.

**White-necked Petrel *Pterodroma cervicalis*.** A large pale *pterodroma* probably this species was seen close to Matthew Island, 22.3S 171.3E on 2 May'08. Another was seen well and positively identified east of Fiji at 17.3S 176.6W on 4 June'08.(NGC)

**Gould's Petrel *Pterodroma leucoptera*.** One came on board on 29 April'08 attracted to ship's deck lights in heavy rain at 22.6S 166E about 20 nm outside New Caledonian barrier reef (NGC).

**Collared Petrel *Pterodroma brevipes*.** Seen near Fiji, with a pale phase bird at 20.2S 175.8E on 4 May'08 and one at 17.4S 179.9E on 6 May'08. In the area around the outlying Tongan island of Nuia Fo'ou a dark phase bird was seen at 15.2S 176.7W on 14 May'08, two pale birds were recorded at 15.5S 175.5W and a dark phase and an intermediate bird at 15.5S 176.2W on 19 May'08 (NGC).

#### **SHEARWATERS *Procellariinae***

**Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*.** SCo recorded 12 in the eastern Atlantic at 50.4N 20.7W on 27 Sept, c.60 at 35.8N 74.4W off Cape Hatteras on 10 Oct and two from 25.8N 79.8W off southern Florida on 14 Oct. SCh saw 12 singles at 41N 8.8W near Portugal on 21 Oct, two singles the next day at 40.1N 9.9W, two at 30.5N 13.4W on 26 Oct, 25 near Fuerteventura, Canary Is. on 27 Oct, five in the same area the next day and c. 100 when departing Santa Cruz, Tenerife, 28.2N 17.3W, on 31 Oct.

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*.** Widespread and seen most days, usually in small numbers from one to three birds, in the area New Caledonia to Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa during May and early June'08. Larger flocks encountered were 250+ at 22.3S 167.3E off New Caledonia on 30 April'08, 10 at 20.5S 173E on 3 May'08 and 15 at 13.9S 172.3W off Savaii, W.Samoa on 17 May'08 (NGC).

**Buller's Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri*.** Several records of mostly single birds migrating north between Fiji and Tonga during May'08, with one at 15S 176.2W on 11 May, one at 15.1S 173.5W on 18 May, one at 16S 177.6W on 23 May, one at 16.3S 178W and two at 16.3S 178.1W on 25 May and one at 18.2S 178.5E on 27 May (NGC).

**Great Shearwater *Puffinus gravis*.** Autumn observations from the North Atlantic area by SCo were two at 50.5N 11.3W SW from Ireland on 26 Sept, 35 at 50.4N 20.7W on 27 Sept, 11 in mid Atlantic at 49.5N 29.5W on 28 Sept, a remarkable 4 to 5,000 heading WSW during the morning of 30 Sept in a mean position of 48.3N 44.6W, two when approaching St.John's Newfoundland on 1 Oct, 13 off Bar Harbor, Maine on 5 Oct and one off Gloucester Mass. on 6 Oct.



Buller's Shearwater *Puffinus bulleri*. 15.1S 173.6W, Tongan waters, 18 April 2008.  
Composite image -ventral and dorsal views, Photograph: Neil Cheshire

**Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*.** In the Atlantic area SCo saw two at 48.1N 45.4W on 30 Sept. SCh saw two at 49 N 6W on 14 Oct, one at 48.5N 7.2W the next day and several singles and groups of three 16 nm off Cape Villano, NW Spain on 18 Oct, one at 41N 8.8W on 21 Oct and the last at 30.5 N 13.4W on 26 Oct. In the South-west Pacific birds were seen moving north between Fiji and Tonga during May'08 with one at 16.3S 178.5W on the 6th, one at 15.1S 176W on the 13th, one at 15.3S 176.6W the next day, one at 15.4S 176.8W, six at 15.4S 175.8W and 12 at 15.4S 175.6W on the 16th, two at 14.5S 172.9W on the 17th. The maximum movement was on the 18th at 15.1S 173.5W with 40-60 birds per hour heading north throughout the day. Later one was seen at 15.9S 177.4W on 23rd, one at 16.3S 177.9W on the 25<sup>th</sup>, two at 18.2S 178.5E on the 27th and the last one at 16.8S 176.9W on 28 May'08 (NGC).



Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*, 15.1S 173.6W, Tongan waters, 18 April 2008. Composite image-ventral and dorsal views. *Photograph: Neil Cheshire*



**Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*.** TJ reported a flock of 'several hundred' medium sized dark shearwaters which were likely this or the previous species at 48N 126W near the Juan de Fuca Strait on 9 April. He also reported 60 at 28.6N 154.9E from the western North Pacific on 25 April and 30-40 the next day at 28.6N 148.5E. In the South-west Pacific, SE from New Caledonia, 100+ were seen at 22S 170E and 20+ at 21.9N 170.8E, both flocks heading north, on 1 May'08. The next day a flock of 150+ was seen heading north at 22.3S 171.3E (NGC).

**Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*.** SCo saw 30 at 50.5S 11.3W, SW of Ireland on 26 Sept and one at 35.8N 74.4W off C.Hatteras on 10 Oct.

**Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus*.** SCh recorded two off the coast of Portugal at 41.8N 8.7W on 19 Oct.

**Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*.** SCo saw 10 at 35.8N 74.4W off Cape Hatteras on 10 Oct. In the SW Pacific, one at 15.3S 176.8W on 16 May'08 and three at 15.5S 176.1W on 19 May'08 (NGC).

#### **STORM-PETRELS *Hydrobatidae***

**European Storm Petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus*.** Seven were seen at 50.5N 11.3W SW from Ireland on 26 Sept by SCo.

**Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro*.** SCh had two probable birds at 37.5N 11.1W on 23 Oct. The next day he positively identified one at 35.1N 11.3W and saw two more off Fuerteventura, Canary Is. on 28 Oct.

**Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*.** In the eastern North Pacific TJ saw one at 28.6N 172.5E on 22 April and another the next day at 28.6N 166.2E. In the western North Atlantic SCo recorded 40 during the afternoon 30 Sept at 48.1N 46.1W.

**Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma monorhis*.** TJ reported two possible birds off the coast of Vietnam at 18.7N 107.9E on 4 Mar'08.

#### **TROPICBIRDS *Phaethontidae***

**Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda*.** One was seen by TJ off NW Australia at 15.3S 114.5E on 22 Mar'08.

**White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*.** Several records from TJ from the Indonesian area during March'08, with three at 2.4S 109.4E in the Karimata Strait on the 8<sup>th</sup>, five in the Java Sea at 6.1S 113.9E on 9<sup>th</sup>, three at 9.9S 115.5E approaching Lombok Strait on 23<sup>rd</sup>, two at 0.3N 119.5E NW of Sulawesi on the 25<sup>th</sup> and one further south off NW Australia on 11 March'08. A few from Fiji-Tonga during May'08 with one at 15.2S 176.8W on 7<sup>th</sup>, one at 14.7S 176.1W on 8<sup>th</sup>, one at 17.7S 179.3E on 27<sup>th</sup> and one at 16.8S 176.9W on 28<sup>th</sup> (NGC).

## PELICANS *Pelecanidae*

**Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis*.** SCo recorded 40+ in St John's River, Jacksonville Florida on 12 Oct, 10 at Port Canaveral the following day and 40 at 15.7N 88.6W off Santo Tomas, Guatemala on 18 Oct.

## GANNETS and BOOBIES *Sulidae*

**Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*.** SCo saw 100+ at 63.4N 20.5W off the south Coast of Iceland on 19 Sept. 50+ in the approaches to St.John's Newfoundland on 1 Oct, three off Halifax Nova Scotia on 4 Oct and eight at 42.6N 70.7W near Gloucester Maine on 6 Oct. In the eastern Atlantic SCh saw 10 at 49N 6W on the 14 Oct and went on to see small numbers most days between there and Leixoes, Portugal on 19 Oct. Further south he saw one at 30.5N 13.4W on 26 Oct.

**Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*.** TJ saw three at 13.5N 110E near Vietnam on 5 Mar'08, one the next day in the South China Sea at 7.2N 109.1E and one at 0.3N 119.3E off Sulawesi on 25 Mar'08. SCo saw one at 16.3N 82.5W off Honduras on 20 Oct.

**Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*.** In the NE Pacific TJ saw one at 28.6N 148.5E on 26 April and another in the South China Sea at 27.9N 126.1E on 31 Mar'08. SCo saw four at Puerto Limon Costa Rica on 22 Oct. Up to 35 adults and imm around Matthew Island at 22.3S 171.3E on 2 May'08, and an imm at 15.1S 173.5W on 18 May'08 (NGC).

**Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*.** TJ recorded one at 28.6N 171.5E on 22 April and another the next day at 28.6N 166.2E near the northern limits of the range in the NE Pacific. Seen most days during May and early June '08 in the area Fiji-Tonga-Western Samoa. Most adult birds were white tailed brown morph. Larger counts included seven at 18.8S 178E off Kadavu on 5 May'08 and seven at 15.4S 175.7E near Nui'a Fo'ou on 16 May'08 (NGC).

## CORMORANTS and SHAGS *Phalacrocoracidae*

**Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*.** Recorded by SCo on east coast of Canada and USA during Oct with eight at 46.8N 56.2W near St Pierre et Miquelon on 2<sup>nd</sup>, 100+ at 46.3N 59.8W approaching Sydney NS on 3<sup>rd</sup>, 'hundreds' at Gloucester Mass on 6<sup>th</sup>, 30+ at 32.7N 79.8W off Charleston SC on the 11<sup>th</sup> and eight at 24.5N 81.8W off Key West on 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*.** TJ saw 60+ at in Vancouver Harbour on 8 April.

## FRIGATEBIRDS *Fregatidae*

**Magnificent Frigatebird *Fregata magnificens*.** In the Caribbean area SCo saw three at 24.6N 81.8W off Key West on 15 Oct, c.30 on the Rio Dulce, Guatemala on 18 Oct, one at 16.3N 82.5W off Honduras on 20 Oct and 10 at Puerto Limon Costa Rica on 22 Oct.

## **PHALAROPES *Phalaropodidae***

**Grey(Red) Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*.** SCh described two flocks. 18 +3, flushed from the sea surface by his ship at 39.8N 10W, 50nm NW from Cape Carvoeiro, Portugal on 22 Oct.

## **SKUAS and JAEGER *Stercorariini***

**Great Skua *Catharacta skua*.** SCo saw two at 63.4N 20.5W off south coast of Iceland on 19 Sept, two SW of Ireland at 50.5N 11.3W on 26 Sept, and three when approaching St.John's Newfoundland on 1 Oct. In the eastern Atlantic SCh saw one at 49N 6W on 14 Oct, one at 48.5N 7.2W the next day, five singles during the day off Cape Villano on 18 Oct and two singles at 41N 8.8W on 21 Oct.

**Southern Skua *Catharacta Antarctica*.** TJ recorded one at 33.3S 115.5E, Bunbury Roads W.Australia on 14 Mar'08.

**McCormick's Skua *Catharacta mccormicki*.** A large skua with pale grey-brown head and body contrasting with black- brown wings seen heading NW at 14.8S 176.1W in Tongan waters on 12 May'08 was considered to be this species(NGC).

**Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*.** SCo recorded one in mid N.Atlantic at 48.9N 37.3W on 29 Sept. In the eastern Atlantic SCh saw six singles off Cape Villano on 18 Oct, two imm at 35.1N 11.3W on 24 Oct and an adult the next day at 32.8N 12.2W.

**Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*.** SCo saw one in mid Atlantic at 49.5N 29.5W on 28 Sept and another was seen by SCh near the Canary Islands at 28.7N 15.6W on 29 Oct.

**Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*.** SCo reported a juvenile bird close to his ship at 48.1N 45.5W in the N.Atlantic on 30 Sept.

## **GULLS *Larinae***

**Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*.** TJ identified 12 at Haiphong Roads 20.8N 106.6E from 1-3 March'08. The very similar dark backed Henglin's Gull *Larus henglini* is also likely here.

**Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*.** SCo saw five at 41.5N 70.5W off Martha's Vineyard, Mass. on 7 Oct, 'thousands' on St.John's River Jacksonville on 12 Oct, 'hundreds' at Port Canaveral on 13 Oct and c.100 on the Rio Dulce, Guatemala on 18 Oct.

**Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*.** In the Yellow Sea TJ saw six at 32.5N 125.3E on 1 April'08 and 15 the next day at Lianyungang Roads, China.

**Sabine's Gull *Larus sabini*.** SCh saw several small flocks 2+15+1+7 on passage about 16 nm off Cape Villano, NW Spain on 18 Oct.

## **TERNS *Sterninae***

**Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*.** SCo saw two on the Rio Dulce, Guatamala on 18 Oct.

**Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*.** Four were seen by SCo at 32.7N 79.7W off Charleston SC on 11 Oct and three the following day on St.John's River, Jacksonville.

**Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*.** Two were seen by SCo off the S coast of Iceland at 64.4N 20.5W on 19 Sept.

**Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*.** SCo saw four at Port Canaveral Florida on 13 Oct.

**Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*.** A feeding flock of 50+ in the reef entrance at 18.1S 178.4E near Suva Fiji on 27 May'08 (NGC).

**Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*.** TJ saw an adult and an imm at Bunbury Roads W.Australia on 15 Mar'08 and two further north at 26.3S 112.8E on 20 Mar'08.

**Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*.** TJ recorded three at 17.6N 126.7E east of the Philippines on 29 Mar'08. At least a 1000, possibly many more at Matthew Island 22.3S 171.3E where they were breeding on 2 May'08, 50 at 20.5S 172.7E and 100 at 20.5S 173E on 3 May'08 and 10 at 20.3S 175.5W on 4 May'08. Thereafter small numbers most days in the area Fiji-Tonga-Western Samoa during May'08 (NGC).

**Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*.** Seven were seen by SCo at Port Canaveral on 13 Oct. He also recorded 200+ on the Rio Dulce, Guatamala on 18 Oct.

**Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*.** SCo saw c.20 at 32.7N 79.7W off Charleston SC on 11 Oct and 30+ at Port Canaveral on 13 Oct.

**Black Noddy *Anous minutus*.** One on board at 15.9S 177.4W east of Fiji on 23 May'08 (see photograph), one at 16.1S 177.7W on 24 May'08. A feeding flock of 300+ in the reef entrance at 18.1S 178.4E near Suva Fiji on 27 May'08 (NGC).

**Grey Ternlet *Procelsterna cerulea*** In the SW Pacific, 30 were seen around Matthew Island at 22.3S 171.3E (NGC).

**White Tern *Gygis alba*** One at 16.9S 179.5W off Taveuni,Fiji on 6 May'08, one at 14.6S 175.9W on 8 May, eight at 15.4S 175.8W near Nuia Fo'ou Tonga on 16 May and one at 15.5S 177.2W on 21 May'08 (NGC).

## **ALCIDS *Alcidae***

**Little Auk *Alle alle*** SCo saw one at 51.5N 9.6W SW from Ireland on 26 Sept and c.200 flying north in small flocks off St.John's Newfoundland on 1 Oct.

*Puffin Fratercula arctica* Two off St.John's on 1 Oct(SCo)

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Grey Gull *Larus modestus*. Adult, Arica, Chile, 19 November 2004.  
Photograph: Neil Cheshire

## DIEGO SURVEY III (2007) - EXPEDITION REPORT

By Major Peter Carr RM

### Abstract

The Royal Navy Birdwatching Society (RNBWS) mounted two expeditions to Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, in May 2005 and November 2007, sponsored by RNBWS, the RSPB and the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP). The aim of the two expeditions was to assess the breeding population of sea birds within Barton Point Important Bird Area (IBA). In May 2005 there were a total of 4370 breeding pairs of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* and in November 2007, 203 breeding pairs. On both expeditions nest building, egg incubation, small helpless chicks, large independent chicks and recently fledged juveniles were found. The results indicate that in the Chagos Red-footed Booby breeds throughout the calendar year with a peak in productivity between January and July. This has implications when calculating breeding populations of this species in the Chagos, when based upon counts from repeated visits in the same month. It is possible that previous estimates of the breeding populations for this species from throughout the Chagos have been underestimated. The May 2005 Red-footed Booby breeding population at Barton Point meets the qualifying criteria of 3000 breeding pairs required for Important Bird Area status (BirdLife International, 2004). Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* and Common White Tern *Gygis alba* were also found to be breeding on both expeditions. From the limited historic evidence of breeding records of Brown Noddy from the Chagos it is not possible to specify the exact breeding period for this species; it is probable that it has a sub-annual breeding strategy and this too has implications when assessing breeding numbers from repeat counts of specific months.

The two expeditions found 15 new species of bird (and one dragonfly) for the Chagos. It also recorded several species that had been recorded very infrequently in the past and this is probably due to under recording in the area rather than rarity of the species.

This report covers the November 2007 activities and discusses the two expeditions' results.

### Introduction

The first recommendation made by the 2005 RNBWS expedition to the British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT), which undertook a complete census of the breeding seabirds of Barton Point Important Bird Area (IBA) on Diego Garcia was,

"A further survey, utilising the same methodology as this expedition should be conducted in either November or December, in order to gather more data on the breeding cycles of the seabirds at Barton Point IBA, particularly the Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*" (Carr, 2005).

The rationale behind this recommendation was that as there were Red-footed Boobies at several different stages of breeding throughout the IBA in May 2005, and this has been shown to affect total counts of breeding birds (Green & Hirons, 1988), a second survey, six months later in the year, would be required, in order to ascertain the true breeding population and to gain a better understanding of the species' breeding strategy.

This recommendation was put as a proposal to the fourth bidding round for financial grants from the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme (OTEP) and was successful. However, HQ BIOT on Diego Garcia could not accommodate the expedition in 2006, so November 2007 presented the first opportunity and on 27 October 2007 a Joint Services team of six ornithologists flew to Diego Garcia to conduct a second survey of the Barton Point IBA breeding seabirds.

For general information on BIOT, including colonisation by man and general history, habitat and ecology and for a flavour of the expeditionary research undertaken in this unique military controlled area, readers should refer to the works of Edis (1998), Sheppard & Seaward (1999) and Bellamy (1979) respectively.

The principal ornithological works on the area are Bourne (1971); Hutson (1975); Bruner (1995); Symens (1999) and McGowan (2008). Some important ornithological notes have also been published by the Chagos Conservation Trust (Hilton, 2002; Guzman, 2003). Also significant is the work of the RNBWS, which over the last 40 years has made a substantial contribution to the ornithological data of the area by publishing mariners' sightings in *Sea Swallow*. Other relevant papers in *Sea Swallow* include Bourne, 1959, 1960, 1966, 1970, and 2001; Pocklington, 1967; Curtis, 1975; Howells, 1983; Cochrane, 1992; Carr, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2003 and 2005.

### **Expedition Aims**

The primary aim of the November 2007 expedition was:

- To undertake a full census of the breeding seabirds of Barton Point IBA using the same methodology as the May 2005 survey.

Secondary aims were to:

- Collect feather samples of Red-footed Booby as part of a global population DNA analysis being undertaken by Queen's University, Kingston, Canada and Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, USA.
- Conduct a full ornithological survey of Diego Garcia.
- Undertake an odontological (dragonfly and damselfly) survey of Diego Garcia.
- Gather other biological records where possible.

### **General Expedition Activity**

On Saturday 27 October 2007 four RNBWS members, Maj Peter Carr Royal Marines (PC), CPO Chris Patrick (CP), CPO Tony Tindale (TT) & CPO Mark Cuts (MC) and two Army Ornithological Society (AOS) members, Lt Col Roger Dickey (RD) and Maj Andrew Bray (AB) departed UK for Diego Garcia and after an unplanned 24-hour delay in Singapore arrived on the evening of Tuesday 30 October. After a day of settling in the group was divided in to two teams of three, one dedicated to the IBA census, feather collecting and when possible dragonfly recording, and the other tasked with the ornithological survey of Diego Garcia. In the event, both teams found it hard work, suffering from varying degrees of fatigue and heat stress.



## The Barton Point Important Bird Area Survey



**Figure 1.** Barton Point Important Bird Area looking south.  
*Photograph: Cathy Heinz available at [www.zianet.com/tedmorris/dg](http://www.zianet.com/tedmorris/dg)*

In November 2007 the Red-footed Booby colony extended along the shoreline of Barton Point for about 28 kilometres, (all of the coastline in Figure 1 and more), to a depth of approximately 10 metres inland. As in May 2005, the first evidence of breeding on the ocean side occurred in the vicinity of Cust Point (7°17.475'S, 72°29.390'E WGS84) and continued around the headland of Barton Point and down the lagoon side as far as East Point (7°21.138'S, 72°27.905'E WGS84). There are some parts of the shoreline where no breeding occurs, generally where stands of Coconut *Cocos nucifera* dominate.

The methodology of the Barton Point IBA survey has been designed in such a way that anyone can repeat the survey at any point in the future and the findings should be directly comparable with the May 2005 and November 2007 results. The principal aim was to be able to extrapolate from the quadrat counts the number of breeding pairs within the total colony area. The methodology also allows the data to be analysed in such a way as to be able to predict peak breeding times and the total number of individuals present in the colony area and their age structure. The Red-footed Booby population of Barton Point IBA is the subject of a future paper that will analyse in more detail the results of the two expeditions and place a numerical value on the total annual breeding population as well as identify the peak breeding months. It will go on to estimate the total population including breeders and non-breeders of all age groups and will also fully explain the methodology so that future researchers can repeat the study. Finally the paper will attempt to give the reason(s) for the populations' breeding strategies (Carr, in press).

Understanding the breeding strategy and having accurate counts of the internationally important Chagos seabird populations are crucial to any conservation management plans for this Overseas Territory. In recognition of this, the future paper on the Red-footed Booby population is the reason the Overseas Territories Environmental Programme generously sponsored the two expeditions.

For both surveys stratified sampling was employed (Sutherland *et al*, 2004, p29), necessary because of the size and linear nature of the colony. The 28 kilometre coast is broken down to five plots of approximately 50 quadrats, two on the ocean side and three on the lagoon side. Daily, one plot was visited and random pre-selected quadrats were counted for Apparently Occupied Nests (AON) (Sutherland, 1996). A count was also made of all birds present and these were assigned to an age category, e.g. adult, immature, juvenile, independent chick, dependent chick. This strategy would have produced a satisfactory daily workload had Barton Point been accessible by vehicle but throughout the November 2007 survey, the vehicle track to Barton Point was blocked by trees and this meant that the IBA survey team had some very long days in the field - beginning with very hot hikes of 10 and 18 miles on the first two days. The ocean-side strip of the colony for safety reasons should only be surveyed on foot, while at the southern end of the lagoon side where the colony overhangs the water, observation is easiest from the water. To survey this part kayaks were hired and day three saw the team paddle over eight miles. The team then hired a small boat to finish the final stretches on the lagoon side up to Barton Point and complete the survey. A total of 105 quadrats of 30 x 10 metres dimension were counted in November 2007 for analysis in conjunction with a total of 116 counted in May 2005.

### **The Diego Garcia Survey**

As with the Barton Point IBA survey, it is essential for future researchers to be able to interpret the results of the two expeditions and in particular to understand how counts of species were derived. What follows therefore is an explanation of the survey techniques employed.

Diego Garcia does not lend itself to traditional ornithological sampling census techniques such as point counts or transects. However, most species congregate in set areas and a total atoll population count can be achieved with a reasonable degree of accuracy in a single long day. Ducks, terns, waders and egrets fall into this countable category, but birds such as Madagascar Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis* and Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis* that roam all over the atoll in all habitats are much more difficult to assess accurately. For follow on expeditions to attempt to replicate the counts of Diego Garcia produced by DGS II and III the areas discussed below should be visited and counted in a single day. The sites are listed in the order it is suggested they be covered, broadly working one's way back to the accommodation area.

Permission must be sought from the British Representative to visit all of the sites mentioned below. There are military sensitivities about the carrying of optical equipment around Diego Garcia and ad hoc birding anywhere on the atoll without prior warning to the base security personnel is ill advised.

**Site One - East Point (7°21.138'S, 72°27.905'E WGS84).** East Point is the site of the old plantation headquarters and once the hub of life on the atoll. The derelict pier at East Point (Figure 2) is the first site to be counted and is a regular tern roost. Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* and Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* can be viewed at close quarters here. Allow 15 minutes.



**Figure 2.** The derelict pier at East Point, a regular tern resting site.

*Photograph: CPO Chris Patrick.*

**Site Two - Horseburgh Point barachois (7°23.242'S, 72°28.880'E WGS84).** This is the most challenging area on the atoll to survey and requires determination and a good level of fitness. The entry point to the lagoons is from the road to East Point where it is closest to the Horseburgh Point lagoons. A struggle through dense 'seavvy' *Scaevola taccada* and relict Coconut *Cocos nucifera* stands brings one to the lagoon shore. It is then a matter of walking through soft mud, climbing over raised rock formations and wading through the lagoon itself to survey the entire area. This is probably the best area for waders on the entire atoll and often holds species not recorded elsewhere, e.g. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* and in 2005, Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (Carr, 2005). Telescopes are essential for viewing distant birds and a minimum of two hours should be allocated.

**Site Three - The Transmitter Site (7°25.855'S, 72°26.510'E WGS84).** The 'Aerial Farm' is an area of donkey grazed low herbage that contains freshwater pools after rain. The best place to park is alongside the road where the bulk of the transmitters are sited. (There are very clear signs warning personnel not to walk among the transmitters because of the radiation hazard). This is traditionally the best site on Diego Garcia for Pacific Golden-plover *Pluvialis fulva* and was where the two Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* were recorded in 2002 (Carr, 2003). Telescopes are essential for viewing distant birds and allow 15 minutes to scan the site.

**Site Four - The southern barachois, Barachois Sylvaine covering Turtle Cove.**

This area encompasses all of the 'mudflats' at the southern end of the lagoon (Figure 3). It is a complex area, difficult to access except at Turtle Cove and the terrain is unfriendly. It is accepted that the survey method proposed neglects the centre barachois, but experience from five visits over 11 years suggests that the two viewing points recommended provide an adequate representation of numbers and species present on and around Barachois Sylvaine. If counts are conducted over a number of days as in all of the Diego Survey expeditions, a feel for the number of birds present in this area is developed.



**Figure 3.** The southern barachois and the Transmitter Site. *Photograph* © of Ted A. Morris Jr and available at [www.zianet.com/tedmorris/dg](http://www.zianet.com/tedmorris/dg)

There are two prime points for viewing and both are accessible by vehicle. The first site is reached by parking at the well sign-posted Turtle Cove parking area (7° 25.826'S, 72° 26.102'E WGS84). On leaving the car park head to the obvious nearby turtle viewing platform and then walk north up the channel towards the lagoon, a distance of less than 100m. The sand-spit at the mouth of channel often holds a tern roost and at low tide waders can be present in good numbers. Returning to the car park head south to a second turtle viewing platform and some 100 metres past this one finds a brackish pool that attracts waders (Turtle Cove Pool, 7° 26.050'S, 72° 26.276'E WGS84), often including Little Stint *Calidris minuta*. The platform itself is a good vantage point from which to scan the south-eastern section of Turtle Cove itself. One must pay strict attention to the rules governing visits to this site because of the risk of disturbing turtles: the rules are clearly visible on display boards in the car park. Allow 30 minutes for this section and telescopes are essential.

The second access point for Barachois Sylvaine is off the main road at the southern-most tip of the atoll (7°26.562'S, 72°25.991'E WGS84). A small track has been cut through five metres of scavvy to facilitate access to the southern shores of the cove. This vantage point affords views over the southern and western reaches and is another good area for waders and terns. This part of the southern barachois complex is a good area for both Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus* and Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*. Allow 15 minutes for viewing and again telescopes are essential.

**Site Five - The Landfill Site** (7°21.250'S, 72°25.914'E WGS84). The Landfill Site, whilst not the most aesthetically pleasing spot in the Chagos is one of the prime birding (and dragonfly) sites and certainly one of the easiest for recording birds. There is a series of freshwater ponds that are probably present throughout the year and attract good numbers of waders and egrets. Birds can be viewed at a relatively close range and only a short distance need be walked. Both the north and south side of the Public Works building should be scanned. This site (which was not covered in 2005) produced Chagos rarities in the form of Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*, Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Great Egret *Casmerodius albus* and Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos*. A word of caution: this is an active waste disposal area and holds all of the associated hazards any other such site would hold. Allow 30 minutes to cover this section and telescopes are advisable.



**Figure 4.** Part of the Landfill Site, an active waste management area that attracts large numbers of waders and egrets. *Photograph: CPO Mark Cutts.*

**Site Six - Point Marianne and associated wetlands** (7°19.400'S, 72°25.665'E WGS84). At the southern end of the runway is an area of natural wetland that is excellent for freshwater-loving species such as ducks and Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. In particular, there is a small pond on the lagoon side of the road that affectionately became known as the Garganey Pond, as *Anas querquedula*, a Chagos rarity was frequently to be seen here. This pond is probably the best Odonata (Dragonfly) site on the atoll and Lesser Green Emperor *Anax gultatus* were regularly seen patrolling around it. The lagoon shore at Point Marianne is also worth scanning as it can hold the largest tern roost on the atoll. Allow 45 minutes for visiting both the pond and Point Marianne; telescopes are advisable.



**Figure 5.** The 'Garganey Pond'. This pond at the southern end of the runway attracted freshwater-loving species and was possibly the best dragonfly site on the atoll as well as containing hundreds of tadpoles. *Photograph: CPO Chris Patrick.*

**Site Seven - Fuel Point Reed Bed** (7°18.199'S, 72°24.200'E WGS84). The Petrol Swamp as it became known is probably the premier birding site on Diego Garcia, though this was not realised until the 2007 trip. It is reached by walking south down the outside of the fence of the Fuel Point and then finding a suitable spot from which to view the wetland. The habitat is brackish water containing some exposed mud, a tidal channel and a dead 'reed-bed' of some description. It is a difficult site to observe with few natural viewpoints and much dead ground but is worth the effort. This site turned up some wholly unexpected birds in 2007, e.g. Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* and a very obliging Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*; it is also an egret and mynah nocturnal roosting area. Telescopes are essential and invariably if good viewing points are to be sought one will have to wade through mud and water to arrive at them. Allow one hour for full coverage of this superb spot.



**Figure 6.** The Fuel Point Reed Bed (Petrol Swamp), possibly the premier birding site on Diego García for waders and heron species. *Photograph:* CPO Chris Patrick.

**Site Eight - The Airfield Water Treatment Works** (7°15.237'S, 72°22.159'E WGS84). This man-made site containing permanent freshwater attracts large numbers of easily viewed egrets and waders; it is also one of two favoured sites for White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*. No walking is required, telescopes are advisable and permission must be sought and the authorities notified before entering. Allow 15 minutes to record all species present.



**Figure 7.** The banks between the ponds at the Airfield Water Treatment Works regularly held flocks of waders and egrets. *Photograph:* CPO Mark Cutts.



**Site Nine - The Down Town Sewage Works** (7°16.305'S, 72°21.815'E WGS84). Another man-made site that has permanent freshwater, it is the other favoured locality of White-winged Tern and was the site where White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* were present during the May 2005 trip (Carr, 2005). Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* were present here in 2007 and an Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* was a regular feature of the surrounding freshwater pools. Minimum walking is required, telescopes are advisable and allow 30 minutes to record all species present.



**Figure 8.** The Down Town Sewage Farm Works with a White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in flight. Photograph: CPO Mark Cutts.

**Sea-watching.** Little sea-watching from land has been carried out in the Chagos and if more were undertaken patterns of seabird movement about the area might become clearer. Limited experience suggests a strong on shore wind moves passing birds closer to Diego Garcia and therefore makes identification easier. On Diego Garcia three sea-watch points have been used. Both Simpson Point (7°16.266'S, 72°21.230'E WGS84) and South Point (7°26.555'S, 72°25.406'E WGS84) were extremely productive when winds were blowing on shore; Eclipse Point (7°15.525'S, 72°22.674'E WGS84) has its true movement of seabirds masked by the constant stream of Red-footed Boobies transiting to and from Barton Point and the three associated islets. During the six hours of dedicated sea-watching conducted on the 2005 and 2007 trips some notable movements did occur and species seldom recorded in the Chagos such as Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes* and Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, were recorded. At the Simpson Point sea-watch on 05 November 2007 there was a pod of four cetaceans surfacing through the surf close in to shore; these fascinating mammals would benefit from more study in the Chagos. Future ornithological teams on Diego Garcia could record useful data by sea-watching from specific points at specific times and this in turn could assist in detecting trends in offshore movements.

**General Observation Techniques.** On the general ornithological survey it is worth noting that many temporary freshwater pools are formed after rain and all are worth checking. It is also worth scanning the sky, particularly over trees, as this is how three species of swift *Apodidae* were found, photographed and identified.

The final note on bird recording on Diego Garcia is that patterns of bird movement around the atoll (and the entire Chagos) both daily and seasonal are not yet understood. Arrival and departure dates of what are thought to be regular migrants remain unknown. In fact the knowledge of the area is so sparse concerning non-seabirds that in many cases it is not possible to categorise birds as either migrants or vagrants. On both of the Diego Survey expeditions new species for the trip turned up almost daily throughout both survey periods. It is thought that these new species were moving in from other atolls in the Chagos or were overshooting migrants from much further north newly arriving rather than birds that had been overlooked on Diego Garcia.

## Results

**Table One:** Checklist of the birds recorded on Diego Garcia from 30 October - 09 November 2007 giving a proposed status and abundance **during the survey period**. Detailed notes for each species recorded are at Annex A. Taxonomy and nomenclature follow BirdLife International (2007).

### Key to Table: Status:

R = Resident      WV = Primarily Northern Hemisphere Winter Visitor

O = Occasional (not seasonal or too few records to categorise)

### Abundance:

A = Abundant (1000-10000+)

C = Common (100- 999)

UC = Uncommon (10-99)

V = Vagrant (1-9)

SPECIES	STATUS	ABUN	COMMENT
Domestic Fowl <i>Gallus gallus</i>	R	C	
Garganey <i>Anas querquedula</i>	WV	V	Third Chagos record, second from Diego Garcia
Wedge-tailed Shearwater <i>Puffinus pacificus</i>	R	UC	
Flesh-footed Shearwater <i>Puffinus carneipes</i>	R	V	
Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	O	V	Second bird for Chagos both on Diego Garcia
Black-crowned Night-heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	O	V	Three separate birds, first for Chagos
Striated Heron <i>Butorides striata</i>	R	C	
Indian Pond-heron <i>Ardeola grayii</i>	O	V	Two separate birds, first for Chagos
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	R	C	East Island is a new breeding site
Great Egret <i>Casmerodius albus</i>	O	V	Second Chagos record both from Diego Garcia
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record all from Diego Garcia

White-tailed Tropicbird <i>Phaethon lepturus</i>	R	UC	
Greater Frigatebird <i>Fregata minor</i>	R	C	
Lesser Frigatebird <i>Fregeta ariel</i>	R	UC	
Red-footed Booby <i>Sula sula</i>	R	A	Estimated 203 pairs breeding at Barton Point IBA
Brown Booby <i>Sula leucogaster</i>	R	UC	
White-breasted Waterhen <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	R	C	
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	O	V	5-8 birds present, <b>first for Chagos</b> - May be resident
Pacific Golden-plover <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	WV	V	Regularly recorded in higher numbers in the past
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	WV	UC	
Common Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record, first from Diego Garcia.
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record, second from Diego Garcia
Lesser Sand Plover <i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	WV	V	Regularly recorded in higher numbers in the past
Greater Sand Plover <i>Charadrius leschenaultia</i>	WV	UC	
Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	O	V	<b>First positive identification for Chagos</b>
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	WV	UC	
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	WV	C	
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record, second from Diego Garcia
Far Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	O	V	<b>First Chagos record</b>
Common Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record all on Diego Garcia
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	O	V	Third Chagos record, second from Diego Garcia
Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	WV	UC	
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	WV	V	Regularly recorded in higher numbers in the past
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	WV	V	Previously recorded in 1971 and 2005
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	WV	V	
Grey-tailed Tattler <i>Heterosceles brevipes</i>	O	V	Fourth record
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	WV	C	
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	WV	UC	
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	WV	V	

Pectoral Sandpiper <i>Calidris melanotos</i>	O	V	Two separate birds, first for Chagos
Curlew Sandpiper <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	WV	C	
Rufi <i>Philomachus pugmox</i>	O	V	Single bird, first for Chagos
Oriental Pratincole <i>Glareola maldivarum</i>	O	V	First for Diego Garcia
Crested Tern <i>Sterna bergii</i>	R	UC	
Rosette Tern <i>Sterna dougalii</i>	R	V	
Black-naped Tern <i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	R	UC	
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	O	V	
Arctic Tern <i>Sterna paradisaea</i>	O	V	
Little Tern <i>Sterna albifrons</i>	R	C	
Saunders's Tern <i>Sterna saundersi</i>	O	V	Two birds, second record for Chagos
Bridled Tern <i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	R	V	
White-winged Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	WV	V	
Brown Noddy <i>Anous stolidus</i>	R	C	Estimated 20 pairs breeding throughout the atoll
Lesser Noddy <i>Anous tenuirostris</i>	R	UC	
Common White Tern <i>Gygis alba</i>	R	UC	Estimated 5 pairs breeding throughout the atoll
Parasitic Jaeger <i>Stereorarius parasiticus</i>	O	V	Two birds, first for Chagos
Madagascar Turtle-dove <i>Nesoenas picturata</i>	R	C	
Zebra Dove <i>Geopelia striata</i>	R	C	
White-throated Needletail <i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>	O	V	First for Chagos
Common Swift <i>Apus apus</i>	O	V	First for Chagos
Fork-tailed Swift <i>Apus pacificus</i>	O	V	First for Chagos
Common Mynah <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	R	A	
Madagascar Red Fody <i>Foudia madagascariensis</i>	R	A	
Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava ssp</i>	O	V	Second and third Chagos records

**Table Two:** Odonata recorded on Diego Garcia during 30 October - 09 November 2007 with comments on occurrence. Classification follows Davies & Tobin (1984, 1985); vernacular names where given are taken from Wikipedia (2008).

SERIAL	SPECIES	NOTES ON OCCURRENCE
01	<i>Ishnura senegalensis</i> (Rambur, 1842) Common Bluetail	Breeding in freshwater pond at end of runway
02	<i>Anax guttatus</i> (Burmeister, 1839) Lesser Green Emperor	Up to three individuals seen at the freshwater area at the end of the runway. First for Diego Garcia
03	<i>Diplacodes trivialis</i> (Rambur, 1842) Chalky Percher	Seen emerging in large numbers on bushes at the end of the runway and also recorded at the Downtown Sewage Works

04	<i>Pantala flavescens</i> (Fabricius, 1798) Globe Skimmer	Up to five found daily hawking shorelines and road sides
05	<i>Tramea limbata</i> (Desjardins, 1832)	Seen laying eggs at the Landfill Site. Identification of this species has still to be confirmed by British Natural History Museum.
06	<i>Macrodiplax cora</i> (Brauer, 1867.) Wandering Pennant	One in Downtown area, one at freshwater pond at the end of the runway.
07	<i>Rhyothemis variegata</i> (Johanson, 1764) Picturewing	Single female. <b>First for Chagos.</b> Specimen in British Natural History Museum. A photograph of the specimen is at Plate 19.

**Table Three:** Mammal, amphibian and reptile sightings recorded on Diego Garcia during 30 October - 09 November 2007.

SERIAL	SPECIES	
01	Hawksbill Turtle <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>	Several small, unidentified turtles recorded in the lagoon. One very large Hawksbill specimen found apparently stranded on the Range Road.
02	Common House Gecko <i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	Regularly seen in the accommodation area.
03	Mourning Gecko <i>Lepidodactylus lugubris</i>	A single specimen found and photographed at the Waste Treatment Site. Specimen identified by British Natural History Museum.
04	Oriental Garden Lizard <i>Calotes versicolor</i>	Regularly found on the golf course, around the Fuel Point and the accommodation area. Identity confirmed by British Natural History Museum.
05	Cane Toad <i>Bufo marinus</i>	Large numbers of tadpoles in a freshwater pond at bottom of airfield were presumed to be of this species. Adults found regularly in accommodation area. Identity confirmed by British Natural History Museum.
06	Donkey <i>Equus asinus</i>	The total numbers of donkeys throughout the entire atoll was estimated at 29.
07	Horse <i>Equus caballus</i>	No horses were found on Diego Garcia.
08	Rat <i>Rattus</i> sp.	Rats were very common away from the accommodation area.
09	Cat <i>Felis silvestris</i>	Two sightings were made of cats.

## Discussion

**Breeding Seabirds:** When the results of the May 2005 and November 2007 expeditions are combined a slightly clearer picture of how certain avian populations use the Chagos starts to form. The Barton Point IBA survey results indicate that the peak-breeding season for Red-footed Booby is between January and July. The lack of breeding activity in November 2007 by any of the *Sternidae* terns that nest synchronously in the Barton Point IBA, (these are Little *Sterna albifrons*, Crested *S. bergii*, Roseate *S. dougallii* and Black-naped Tern *S. sumatrana*) suggests that January to July is the main breeding period for the majority of seabirds in the Chagos. This evidence supports the work undertaken by Symens (1999) and McGowan (2008) who have conducted breeding seabird counts throughout the Chagos in February and March.

The Diego Surveys also prove that Red-footed Booby (and Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* and Common White Tern *Gygis alba*) breed throughout the year. As noted by Hilton (2002) this continuous breeding strategy has implications when assessing total breeding populations. Single counts of atolls in a specific month will not reveal the atoll's total annual breeding population. It is likely that many of the historic records of breeding numbers of Red-footed Booby in the Chagos have been underestimates.

A cautionary note is sounded when interpreting the two expeditions' findings for Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* (and probably Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*). It is stressed that the two expeditions have merely provided data from a specific place at two fixed points in time. It could be interpreted that (as with the *Sternidae* and *Sula sula*) finding breeding birds in May of one year and then not in November on a return visit, as happened with both *Anous* species, indicates that their peak breeding season too is between January and July. In their case, however, this interpretation could well be wrong. The limited Chagos data records synchronised terrestrial breeding by Brown Noddy in February and March (Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008); May (Hutson, 1975; Carr, 2005); July (Bruner, 1995) and August (Carr, 1998). Brown Noddy is known to have a sub-annual breeding cycle elsewhere in the world (Chapin, 1954) and this may be the breeding strategy adopted in the Chagos. Therefore, when interpreting repeat counts from specific atolls on a specific date, particularly when IBA criteria are being assessed, great care must be taken in the interpretation. A lack of breeding *Anous* species on a certain date when compared with a count for the same date previously may not necessarily mean a catastrophic decline if none are present; it may merely indicate that a better understanding of these species' breeding strategy in the Chagos is needed.

It has been suggested that on rat free atolls Brown Noddy breeds in large numbers synchronously and terrestrially and on rat infested atolls breeds asynchronously and arboreally (Carr, 2005 p15). The data gathered on the two RNBWS surveys appears to support this hypothesis. In May 2005 synchronised terrestrial breeding by over 100 pairs was occurring on rat-free West Island. In November 2007 the recently fledged birds on Middle Island and West Island were probably the last of these (synchronised terrestrial) breeders. Elsewhere on rat-infested mainland Diego Garcia there were only isolated arboreal pairs.

**Non-breeding Seabirds:** The offshore passage of Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* and Flesh-footed Shearwater *P. carneipes* past Diego Garcia that was noted on the limited number of sea-watches is also of interest and warrants further study to ascertain if there is any

regular pattern to the movements. Shearwaters have been shown to breed in the outer atolls of the Chagos (Baldwin, 1975; Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008), though their specific use of the Chagos waters and the surrounding deep oceans is poorly understood.

The remaining non-breeding seabird records are all in accord with previous expedition findings and demonstrate that Diego Garcia holds small numbers of a variety of seabirds throughout the non-breeding season, particularly *Sternidae* and *Anous* species.

**Resident Land-birds:** As with any ornithological interpretation from the Chagos, because of the limited data available a cautious approach is needed. The two combined RNBWS expedition findings suggest that there has been no marked change in the populations of the very few recognised resident land-birds. The exception to this is Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*. Whilst still not back to the numbers present in the mid 1990s when flocks of 100 plus were a regular find (Bruner, 1995; Carr, 1996, 2000), numbers had increased by November 2007 to 150-200 from a low of less than 50 birds in December 2002 (Carr, 2003).

The offshore breeding by this species is also of interest. It is possible that the mainland-breeding colony has been deliberately disturbed in attempt to control numbers, in an effort to reduce the risk of bird strikes on aircraft. The fact that the numbers breeding on the off shore, off limits atolls is increasing will prove an interesting challenge in management terms. It is possible that a cull of breeding birds on the off shore islets will be asked for in order to reduce the growing numbers on the mainland. If any control measures are exercised on the islet breeding populations they should be undertaken outside peak booby and noddy breeding seasons. Care also needs to be taken to avoid destroying the *Scaveola* that is used as breeding habitat by both Cattle Egret and Red-footed Booby.

The finding of five to eight Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* at three different sites raises the interesting question of the true status of this species on Diego Garcia. The history of 'moorhens' on Diego Garcia can be traced back to Loustau-Lalanne (1962) who reported that he was told of birds resembling moorhens on Diego Garcia but never found them himself. It was thought that the 1995 records of White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* by Bruner (1995) had solved the 30-year old mystery of what the reported moorhen actually was; the November 2007 records now cast some doubt. It is possible that with five to eight birds being recorded from three different locations, there may have been a very small resident population for a number of years.

Finally, on resident land-birds, the future status of Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii* should be monitored. The former is a noted vagrant whilst the latter is regarded as sedentary (Hancock & Kushlan, 1984). The future of the birds found on Diego Garcia in November 2007, whether they colonise or return north remains to be seen.

**Migrants and Vagrants:** The finding of fifteen new species during the two surveys fully supports Bourne's 1971 statement that '...it is clear that the archipelago still receives a fair number of stray vagrants from the north...' (Bourne, 1971 p200). It also raised the comment that 'This is something of a record from a national territory in recent times.' (RSPB pers comm.).



Of the new species, eleven have been recorded as breeding or occurring in the Maldives (Phillips, 1963; Strickland & Jenner, 1978; Ash & Shafeeg, 1994; Anderson, 2007). These are Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*; Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*; Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (all first recorded May 2005); Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*; Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*; Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*; Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*; Rufi *Philomachus pugnax*; Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*; White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* and Common Swift *Apus apus*. It could therefore be expected that a breeding species or overshooting migrant that occurs further north up the Laccadive - Maldive chain (of which the Chagos is the natural terminal) would one day be recorded in the Chagos. White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*, Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*, Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* and Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* were new species for this area of the Indian Ocean.

With respect to the new seabirds, since Gull-billed Tern is suspected of breeding in the Maldives (Ash & Shafeeg, 1994) and is migratory, it was very likely to occur in the Chagos at some point. White-cheeked Tern remains an enigmatic species in that it is known to breed in the Northwest Indian Ocean (Harrison, P. 1983) but its specific wintering range remains uncertain, with Cramp (1985) stating, 'possibly stays well offshore in winter.' The record of nine birds in May 2005 (Carr, 2005) may help to substantiate this comment.

Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi* (formerly Saunder's Little Tern *Sterna albrifrons saundersi*) was believed to occur in the Chagos as long ago as 1983 (Bourne, in Howell, 1983). Advances in the understanding of the diagnostic features necessary for accurate identification of this very tricky species (Harrison, C. 1983) have led to confirmation that it occurs in the Chagos. However, its global distribution, breeding biology and migratory patterns are still little understood. Future ornithologists operating in the Chagos would do well to concentrate on the flocks of Little Tern that occur, particularly on Diego Garcia, to ascertain the numbers of Saunders's Tern present and the dates they occur. It is suspected that due to the difficulties of identifying this species, *saundersi* occurs in larger numbers in the Chagos than is being reported.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus* has been positively identified three times in the Maldives, and five other records may have been this species (Anderson, 2007). Anderson (2007) in his synopsis of this species for the Maldives quotes records from the eastern Arabian Sea and the Seychelles and further suggests, 'It is likely that this species is under-recorded in the region: at sea dark and intermediate morph individuals can easily be confused with Brown Noddy....' The difficulty of identifying a distant jaeger at sea and the general lack of sea-watching from the Chagos may explain why there have been so few records of positively identified *Stercoridae* in this region.

Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* breeds in North Siberia and North America with the vast bulk of the population wintering in southern South America with a smaller number regularly wintering in Australia and New Zealand (Marchant *et al.*, 1986). It is a noted vagrant, with records from oceanic groups such as Hawaii, Falkland Isles, South Georgia, Azores and Madeira (Marchant *et al.*, 1986). Whilst well out of this bird's expected range the finding and photographing of two Pectoral Sandpipers on Diego Garcia in November 2007 was not exceptional.

Fork-tailed (or Pacific) Swift *Apus pacificus* has an Eastern Palearctic distribution, generally breeding in the north and wintering south to Malaysia, the Sundas, New Guinea and Australia (Chantler & Driessens, 2000). Vagrants have been noted globally from the Seychelles (10 up to 1995); sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island; England; New Zealand and five in the western Aleutians and Pribilofs (Chantler & Driessens, 2000). Whilst not recorded in the Maldives previously, the finding and photographing of this species in November 2007 on Diego Garcia was not totally unexpected.

The two expeditions also found several other species that had been recorded fewer than five times previously in the Chagos. Some of these species had not been seen since the Joint Services expeditions to the outer atolls in the early 1970's. The recording and in most cases photographing of Garganey *Anas querquedula*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* and Oriental Pratincole *Glareolum maldivarum* greatly assist in building up the ornithological picture of this under-watched area.

The finding of 15 new species by the two expeditions and the identifying of several species that have been recorded fewer than five times in the past is not thought necessarily to reflect a species rarity in the Chagos; it is more likely to be a result of the lack of opportunity for recording of birds in the area in the past when compared with the recent highly concentrated efforts of two teams of enthusiastic, competent ornithologists. It is testimony to the contribution of the UK Armed Forces, particularly RNBWS via *Sea Swallow*, that all of the 'little recorded' species above were found in the past by Service-led visits. These were aboard ships (Curtis, 1975), Joint Services expeditions (Baldwin, 1975; Bellamy, 1979), personnel serving or visiting Diego Garcia on duty (Howells, 1983; Carr, 1996, 2003) or RNBWS expeditions (Carr, 1997, 2005). It should however be stressed that several non-Service ornithologists have also recorded some of these species (e.g. Hutson, 1975; Bruner, 1995), while others have made huge ornithological contributions concerning the internationally important seabird communities (Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008).

**Odonata.** Less is known of the dragonflies of the Chagos than the birds. The most comprehensive paper covering the dragonflies of the Chagos does not list Picturewing *Rhyothemis variegata* as having been recorded before (Barnett & Emms, 1997a). The female specimen captured on Diego Garcia that is pictured in Plate Nineteen of this journal, the identity of which has been confirmed by D Goodger of the British Natural History Museum is therefore a first for the area. Lesser Green Emperor *Anax guttatus* has not been recorded on Diego Garcia before (Barnett & Emms, 1997a). This distinctive species was regularly recorded in ones and twos hawking over the freshwater stream and ponds at the bottom of the airfield. The Odonata records in full will be discussed further in a separate article to be published (if accepted) in a specialist dragonfly journal.

**Herpetological Observations:** Barnett and Emms (1997b) are also the authors of the most comprehensive paper on amphibians and reptiles in the Chagos. The RNBWS November 2007 expedition found two species, Oriental Garden Lizard (or Bloodsucker) *Calotes versicolor* and Cane Toad *Bufo marinus*, that were not recorded in the Chagos up to the time of the

Barnett & Enms publication. Both of these species have been recorded since 1997 and are known to be present in some numbers.

The agamid Oriental Garden Lizard pictured in Plate Twenty, (determined from photographs by Dr Colin McCarthy, Dept of Zoology, BNHM) was a regular sight along side roads leading out of the Downtown area, the Fuel Point area and on the golf course. It was first recorded on Diego Garcia in May 2001 (Guzman, 2003) and as predicted by Guzman of the Diego Garcia Environmental Team, it appears to have spread rapidly.

The Cane Toad *Bufo marinus* (a photograph of which is at Plate Twenty-One) is of South American origin and has been deliberately introduced in several countries as a biological control measure. How it reached Diego Garcia is uncertain but it appears to have first arrived in this century (Lever, 2003). A mass of tadpoles in the Garganey Pond at the bottom of the airfield were believed to be of this species. The effect of this (unwelcome) invasive species remains to be seen.

**Mammal Records:** It is interesting to compare Howells' few mammal records in *Sea Swallow* from his year posting as an LMA on Diego Garcia in 1982/3. He recorded three horses *Equus caballus* and over a hundred donkeys *Equus asinus*. (Howells, 1983). All were undoubtedly a relief from the plantation days. It would be safe to say that the horse is now extinct on Diego Garcia and donkey numbers appear to have dropped by some 75%. The maximum number of donkey recorded on any one day was 29. The regular site for donkeys is in the open fields surrounding the Transmitter Site; however, single extremely skittish donkeys were encountered all the way up to Barton Point, on the shoreline and also in dense scrub.

No report of Diego Garcia would be complete without a mention of cats *Felis silvestris* and rats *Rattus sp.* A programme of cat eradication has been ongoing and is bearing fruit. Only two sightings were made of cat, one which broke cover out of bushes at the Landfill Site and very quickly disappeared and the second was of paw prints in the inter tidal mud at the southern end of the Barachois Sylvaine. Rat numbers would be impossible to estimate. Whilst none were noted in the accommodation area, probably as a result of an extensive control programme, once passing the bottom of the airfield an indication of their number is that one rat would be seen every ten metres if one stopped and observed - every five metres when in Barton Point IBA.

## Summary

The two RNBWS expeditions produced a wealth of data that can and will contribute to the conservation of birds in the Chagos and provide historical documentation of other taxa. The expeditions have shown that Red-footed Booby have a continuous year round breeding cycle with the peak in breeding occurring between January and July. This is important information when assessing total breeding numbers and formulating management plans. The finding of 15 new species of birds for the Chagos demonstrates what a team of competent ornithologists can discover in a short period; it also highlights how much there is still to learn about birds in the Chagos. This is particularly true when attempting to assess what species occur, in what numbers and when they arrive and depart the atolls. The incidental recording of dragonflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians provides evidence of possible colonisation and changes

in populations that will be of historical use. For a minimal cost and with limited disturbance to the HQ BIOT staff the contribution of the findings by the two RNBWS trips has been very good value for money.

### **Recommendations**

- If any control measures are to be exercised on Cattle Egret breeding on West and East Island, consideration should be given to other breeding populations on the islets. Any control measures should not destroy habitat and should only be undertaken outside the peak Red-footed Booby and Brown Noddy breeding season.
- Any management work planned for the Barton Point IBA area, e.g. major track clearing, should be undertaken between September and December in order not to disturb the peak period of breeding Red-footed Booby.
- Expert herpetological advice should be sought as to the potential consequences of a growing population of Cane Toad *Bufo marinus* and Oriental Garden Lizard *Culotes versicolor*.
- RNBWS should repeat the survey of Barton Point IBA and Diego Garcia within three to five years.

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## **ANNEX A – Detailed Ornithological Records**

### **Domestic Fowl *Gallus gallus***

The feral population continues to thrive on Diego Garcia, mainly around the accommodation areas. One case of recent breeding was recorded with two approximately two-day old chicks being found in the accommodation area on 06 November 2007. The total atoll population is extremely difficult to assess; there are definitely in excess of 100 birds on Diego Garcia.

### **Garganey *Anas querquedula***

Up to four birds were regularly present on a freshwater pond (soon known by expedition members as the Garganey Pond) at the southern end of the runway throughout the survey period. Although wary, these birds were adequately photographed for proof of identification, one of which appears in this journal as Plate One. One photograph of all four birds in flight together appears to show one male in eclipse, a female and two juveniles; a possible family party. This species was first recorded in the Chagos by Hirons on Egmont (1973) and latterly by Bruner (1995) on Diego Garcia. Flocks of ducks have been recorded but not identified on Diego Garcia as far back as 1960 (Loustau-Lalanne, 1962, p72).

### **Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus***

A strong south easterly wind brought a steady stream of 42 birds past a six-man sea watch near Simpson Point in an hour on 05 November 2007 and a further 15 in an hour past a one-man sea watch at the southern tip of the horse-shoe on 08 November 2007. These records are not unexpected from a species that breeds within the Chagos archipelago (Baldwin, 1975; Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008).

### **Flesh-footed Shearwater *Puffinus carneipes***

Three birds passed a sea watch near Simpson Point in an hour of strong southeasterly onshore winds on 05 November 2007. This species has been recorded in the seas around the Chagos in Bourne (1971); Curtis (1975) and Symens (1999). It is not recorded as a breeding species in the Chagos.

### **Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus***

A surprise single bird was watched at the Airfield Water Treatment Site on 31 October 2007 and relocated on 05 November 2007 at the Landfill Site. A previous individual bird graced Diego Garcia from at least 1995 to 1997 (Bruner, 1995; Symens, 1996; Carr, 1996, 2000).



**Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax***

An adult, immature and juvenile were recorded on 01 November 2007 at the Fuel Point Reed Bed and the adult and immature were found again at the same site on 04 November 2007. Photographs were obtained, one of which appears in this journal as Plate Two. These records of this species are the first for the Chagos.

**Striated Heron *Butorides striata***

*Butorides striata* remains a common bird throughout the entire atoll and is found on all three of the islets in the mouth of the lagoon. This species is difficult to count accurately as it is found in all habitats, does not congregate and is relatively unobtrusive; a conservative estimate of the atoll population after a visit to all areas in November 2007 is a minimum of 100 birds.

**Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii***

A surprise find was a juvenile Indian Pond-heron at the Landfill Site on 31 October 2007. The surprise increased when an adult was found in the wetlands at the end of the runway on 04 November 2007. The juvenile was seen again at the Landfill site on 04, 05 and 06 November 2007 and was well photographed. A photograph of the adult appears at Plate Three. These birds are the first of their species to be recorded in the Chagos.

**Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis***

This species has certainly increased since the May 2005 survey when numbers on Diego Garcia were estimated at 30–50 birds (Carr, 2005). The total population for Diego Garcia, including the three islets is estimated in November 2007 to be 150 – 200 birds. The breeding colony on West Island had increased from 6 pairs in May 2005 to 20 – 25 pairs in November 2007. Again, as in 2005, all stages of breeding were recorded from incubation through to recently fledged chicks. A second newly established colony that contained a maximum of six pairs was found at the western tip of East Island. Several of the adult birds sitting atop the *Scaveola* bushes that held nests and young on West Island had coral-red legs and bills indicating peak physiological breeding condition (Hancock and Kushlan, 1984, p142).

**Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*.**

Most likely one, but possibly two birds were on Diego Garcia throughout the survey period with records coming from the Landfill Site or the Fuel Point Reed Bed on most days. This bird(s) was well photographed and appears in this journal as Plate Four. This is the second record for the Chagos, the first being recorded on 29 March 1996 on Diego Garcia (Carr, 1996).

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***

A single bird was recorded at the Fuel Point Reed Bed on 01 and 04 November 2007. This is the third record for the Chagos, all other sightings coming from Diego Garcia by RNBWS members (Carr, 1996, 2005).

**White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus***

The maximum count was eight from various points around the atoll on 31 October 2007. One to three birds were seen most days and no strong evidence of breeding activity was noted.

**Greater Frigatebird *Fregata minor***

A conservative estimate of 200 loafing birds of all ages on the mainland at Barton Point on 06 November 2007 is probably the highest count from mainland Diego Garcia on record. As expected, this species was numerous on the islets in the mouth of the lagoon with 150 loafing birds on Middle Island and 100 on East Island on 07 November 2007.

**Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*.**

Very few positive identifications of this species were made, the only certainties being singletons at Turtle Cove on 03 and 04 November 2007, with two birds there on 06 November 2007. A single bird was positively identified on Middle Island on 07 November 2007.

**Red-footed Booby *Sula sula***

The most numerous seabird encountered throughout the expedition. Quadrat counts of mainland Barton Point resulted in extrapolated totals of 1260 juveniles; 1328 immature birds; 6593 non-breeding adults and 203 active breeding pairs. West, Middle and East Isles added a further minimum of 90 juveniles; 90 immature; 720 non-breeding adults and 79 breeding pairs. It was of note that West Island was out of kilter with the mainland and other two isles in that very little breeding was occurring on Barton Point and East and Middle Isle whilst West Island had a very high percentage of Apparently Occupied Nests. The reason for this is unclear.

Approximately 100 birds loafing in a dead hardwood tree in the southern barachois at Shark's Cove was of interest and a development that future ornithologists visiting Diego Garcia should endeavour to investigate in order to ascertain if breeding is to start there in the future.

**Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster***

A single adult was loafing on the mainland at Barton Point on 01 November 2007, possibly the first record of this species on mainland Diego Garcia itself for many years. Less surprising was the recording of 10 adults and a single immature on East Island on 07 November 2007.

**White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus***

Birds were sighted from Barton Point to the accommodation area. 18 birds were noted on a drive from the range gate to the Airfield Sewage Farm on 05 November 2007. Whilst the total number of birds present is difficult to assess with confidence, the atoll population is thought to be a minimum of 70-100 birds.

**Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***

Probably the biggest surprise of the entire trip was the recording of five to eight Common Moorhen from three locations on Diego Garcia. Although secretive and difficult to photograph, some shots were achieved and one appears in this journal as Plate Five. The Fuel Point Reed Bed is where the concentration of the population were centred with five to six birds recorded on 01 November 2007; other sightings were of singletons at the Landfill Site on 04 November 2007 and another singleton in the wetlands alongside the airfield road on the same day. These birds constitute the first confirmed records for this species in the Chagos.

**Pacific Golden-plover *Pluvialis fulva***

This species was not as numerous as on previous trips. The maximum count for any day was three on a grassy field in the vicinity of the Down Town Sewage Farm on 31 October 2007. Only one bird was recorded from the donkey-grazed fields around the Transmitter Site, traditionally the favoured haunt of *P. fulva*; this was on 08 November 2007.

**Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola***

Grey Plover is a fairly ubiquitous species on Diego Garcia, though the preferred habitat appears to be the barachois. Counts throughout the atoll during the survey period produced highs of 22 on 01 November 2007 and 26 on 04 November 2007.

**Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula***

A single bird was recorded and photographed at the Landfill Site on 08 November 2007 and appears as Plate Six of this journal. There are two previous records possibly of the same bird from Ile Lubine, Egmont on 08 December 1972 and 01 January 1973 (Hirons, 1973).

**Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus***

Four birds were noted at the Fuel Point Reed Bed on 01 November; two at Turtle Cove on 03 November; six at the same site the following day; two at Horseburgh Point on 06 November and one at Turtle Cove on 08 November 2007. Photographs were obtained, one of which appears as Plate Seven. This species has been previously recorded by Hirons (1973) from Egmont in January 1973; by Braner who records ten non-breeding plumage birds on Diego Garcia in March 1995 and by McGowan (pers. comm) who recorded one bird from the Salomons in March 2006.

**Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus***

This species was found in greater numbers than in May 2005, though Hirons' record of eight on Egmont on 04 January 1973 remains the highest total on a single day from the Chagos. During this survey Horseburgh Point lagoons produced four birds on 01 November 2007 and two on 06 November 2007. Turtle Cove held two on 03 November 2007, six on 04 November 2007 and a singleton on 08 November 2007. This species remains faithful to the barachois and is rarely found in any other type of habitat on Diego Garcia.

**Greater Sandplover *Charadrius leschenaultia***

Similar to the preceding species, Greater Sandplover prefers the muddy areas of both Horseburgh Point and the southern barachois and is rarely encountered anywhere else on Diego Garcia. Always more numerous on the atoll than *C. mongolus*, the highest count of the survey period was 37 found at Horseburgh Point lagoons and Turtle Cove on 01 November 2007.

**Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago***

A single snipe was on the Garganey Pond on 05 November 2007. An excellent series of photographs of it was taken by Chris Patrick and these have been passed around the birding community for comment; one of the photographs appears in this journal at Plate Eight. The unanimous opinion is that the bird is a Common Snipe. The bird keys to Common Snipe when using Marchant *et al* (1991, pp 394-5) and this author agrees with the independent opinions given. Unidentified snipe species have been recorded from Diego Garcia as far back as 1905 (in Bourne, 1971); this bird is the first positively identified *Gallinago* for the Chagos.

**Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica***

This species was present in greater numbers than any other previous recorder had found them. Most numerous on the barachois, it occasionally is found at the water treatment plants or Landfill Site. The maximum count throughout the survey period was a minimum of 15 birds on the atoll on 31 October 2007 followed by 11 on 05 November 2007 and eight on 06 November 2007.

**Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus***

Another ubiquitous wader found throughout Diego Garcia and also one of the most numerous. There were at least 100 birds on the atoll throughout the survey period.

**Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata***

One or two birds were present on Diego Garcia. A single bird was recorded at Barton Point on 08 November and a possible second bird was on the freshwater ponds at the southern end of the runway on the same day. An uncommon species in the Chagos, the records to date are: a single bird shot on Diego Garcia in December 1960 (Loustau-Lalanne, 1962); two records from Egmont in November 1972 (Hirons, 1973); four birds together on Diego Garcia on 06 October 1974 (Curtis, 1975).

**Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis***

A single bird was watched and photographed at Turtle Cove between 04-06 November and appears in this journal as Plate Nine. Initially identified as Eurasian Curlew, examination of a series of photographs revealed a dark back, rump and underwing, diagnostic features of this species. This identification by Chris Patrick with hindsight ties in with observations at the time, whereby the bird was thought to appear dark and the onomatopoeic call was not right for the well-known nominate.

**Common Redshank *Tringa totanus***

Found only at Horseburgh Point, these were a singleton on 01 November, two on 02 November and a singleton on 06 November 2007. One of these birds was photographed and appears in this journal as Plate 10. *T. totanus* is not a common species in the Chagos having only been recorded previously by Bruner (1995) and Diego Survey II in 2005 (Carr, 2005).

**Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis***

A single individual found by Mark Cuts at Horseburgh Point on 01 November 2007 was the only expedition record. *T. stagnatilis* is not a common species in the Chagos, the only other records coming from Curtis (1975) who recorded a bird on the Salomon group and Diego Survey II in May 2005 (Carr, 2005).

**Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***

Common Greenshank is a regular winter visitor in small numbers to the Chagos. This species was seen daily in all types of wetlands and it is estimated that there were a minimum of 10 birds on Diego Garcia throughout the survey period.

**Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola***

Two birds were recorded and photographed on the Garganey Pond at the southern end of the

runway on 05, 06 and 08 November 2007. A picture is emerging that Wood Sandpiper is a regular northern hemisphere winter visitor to the Chagos with several birds being noted in January 1973 on Egmont (Hirons, 1973); a single bird seen twice in April 1971 by Hutson (1975); LMA Martin Howell who spent a year serving on Diego Garcia noted birds on 14 occasions and up to four birds were found daily on ephemeral ponds in March 1996 (Carr, 1996).

#### **Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus***

Based upon sightings from this trip, Terek Sandpiper is possibly a more numerous northern winter visitor to the Chagos than previously believed. Historic records come from Hutson (1975) who records two birds on Diego Garcia on 23 and 24 April 1971 and from the RNBWS 2005 expedition that located a total of four individuals during their visit in May 2005, all from Horseburgh Point (Carr, 2005). This species certainly appeared to prefer the remote barachois throughout this survey, with Horseburgh Point lagoons holding 5 birds on 01 November 2007, with another bird being seen at the Fuel Point Reed Bed on the same day. Horseburgh Point lagoons also held four birds on 02 November 2007 and three on 06 November 2007. Other birds were found at Turtle Cove (2) on 03 November 2007 and a singleton was in the unusual habitat of the Airfield Water Treatment site on 05 November 2007.

#### **Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos***

This species appears to be a regular northern winter visitor to the Chagos in small numbers. The maximum count during 31 October–08 November 2007 was eight birds spread throughout the atoll on 31 October 2007. The Down Town Sewage Farm produced the highest site count with four birds feeding along the waterline on 03 November 2007.

#### **Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes***

An extraordinarily obliging bird was found feeding along a channel that flowed from the lagoon in to the Fuel Point Reed Bed on 03 November 2007. This bird was relocated the following day and allowed exceptionally good views and photographs to be taken, one of which is at Plate Eleven. To assist identification even further, in front of all six team members the bird circled low overhead giving out the diagnostic and unmistakable “disyllabic, upslurred whistle” (Marchant *et al.*, 1991). This record constitutes the fourth record for the Chagos, all being seen on Diego Garcia; the first being found by Bruner (1995); all other records coming from RNBWS members (Carr, 1996, 1997).

#### **Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres***

This species was the most numerous shorebird present on Diego Garcia during the survey period. It was estimated that the minimum number on the atoll was 300, with Horseburgh Point lagoons holding 118 on 01 November 2007.

#### **Sanderling *Calidris alba***

The build up of the ornithological knowledge of the Chagos over the last two decades has shown that Sanderling is a regular northern winter visitor to the Chagos in small numbers. The maximum count during the survey period was 12 evenly spread throughout various locations on 06 November 2007.

### **Little Stint *Calidris minuta***

At least four Little Stints were present on Diego Garcia during 31 October - 08 November 2007, this is likely the highest individual tally from the Chagos to date. The preferred habitat of Horseburgh Point lagoons held three on 01 November 2007 whilst a further bird was recorded from the Fuel Point Reed Bed on the same day. A single bird was feeding along the waterline of the Down Town Sewage Farm on 04 November 2007, whilst the Airfield Water treatment site held a singleton on 05 and 06 November 2007. Finally a further lone bird was located in Turtle Cove on 06 November 2007. The pattern is possibly emerging that this species is a regular northern winter visitor in small numbers with previous sightings by Bruner in 1996 and RNBWS members in 1996 and possibly 2005 (Carr, 1996, 2005).

### **Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos***

At least two Pectoral Sandpipers were present on Diego Garcia during 31 October - 08 November 2007. The first bird was located at the Landfill Site in amongst a flock of Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* on 31 October 2007; this bird was well photographed and a shot appears as Plate Twelve. On 01 November 2007 another bird was located at the Fuel Point Reed Bed; on 04 November 2007 Horseburgh Point lagoons turned up the third sighting and the final viewing was at the Airfield Water Treatment Site on 08 November 2007. This author believes that these sightings come from locations too dislocated to be the same bird moving about the atoll. These are the first records of this species for the Chagos.

### **Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea***

Along with Ruddy Turnstone this species is the most commonly encountered shorebird on Diego Garcia, being found in any habitat that has water. Horseburgh Point lagoons had the highest site total with 121 birds on 01 November 2007. The highest daily count for the entire atoll was 244 birds on 06 November 2007. Curlew Sandpiper has been recorded throughout all of the atoll groups of the Chagos and is a common winter visitor with some birds over-summering.

### **Ruff *Philomachus pugmax***

A single Ruff was found on an ephemeral freshwater pond in the vicinity of the Down Town Sewage Farm on 05 November 2007 and was seen there again on the following day. This bird was well photographed and appears at Plate Thirteen of this journal. This is the first record of this species in the Chagos.

### **Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum***

Two Oriental Pratincole were present on Diego Garcia during 31 October - 08 November 2007. The first bird was located in a grassy field by the Down Town Sewage Farm on 31 October 2007; this bird was well photographed and a shot of it appears at Plate Fourteen. This bird was static for most of the observation period; when approached too close it would fly a minimum distance, displaying the diagnostic wing markings of this species, before settling down again. A second individual was located at the Landfill site on 04 November 2007 where it remained until the team departed on 08 November 2007. This species has been seen in the Chagos once before in the Egmont group by Hirons (1973) whilst on a Joint Services Expedition, who regularly recorded four birds between November - December 1972.

**Crested Tern *Sterna bergii***

This species was not as numerous as on the May 2005 survey; the maximum count on any day was a total of 40 concentrated at Horseburgh Point lagoons and the Turtle Cove area on 31 October 2007. Fully-fledged juvenile birds were seen begging for food on several occasions. This species has been proved to breed in the Chagos (Hirons, 1973; Cochrane, 1992; Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008).

**Roseate Tern *Sterna dougalii***

Two non-breeding plumage adults were loafing on the derelict pier at East Point on 03 November 2007. Roseate Tern has been recorded by previous observers (Hutson, 1975; Bruner, 1995; Carr, 2005) and proved to breed in the Chagos by Symens (1999) and McGowan (2008).

**Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana***

This species was not as numerous as on the May 2005 survey; the maximum count from all areas visited on any one day was 25 on 31 October 2007. Black-naped Tern is one of the most numerous *Sternidae* terns of the Chagos and had been proved to be breeding previously by Hutson (1975), Symens, (1999); McGowan, (2008). No evidence of breeding was witnessed in the November 2007 survey.

**Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***

One bird was found on the derelict pier at East Point on 02 November 2007 and another was located at Horseburgh Point the same day. *S. hirundo* is not common in the Chagos, the only previous records being a single bird on Middle Brother (Baldwin, 1975), a single on Egmont (Bellamy, 1979), up to six adults on Diego Garcia in March 1995 (Bruner, 1995) and eight summer plumaged birds in August 1997 (Carr, 1997).

**Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea***

Four birds were feeding over the Airfield Water Treatment Site on 08 November 2007. This species has been recorded before by RNBWS in March 1996 (Carr, 1996); August 1997 (Carr, 1997) and up to ten in May 1995 (Carr, 2005).

**'Commie' Tern *Sterna hirundo/paradisaea***

On 01 November 2007 there were three at Horseburgh Point and singles at the same site on 04 and 06 November 2007. Other birds lumped as 'Commies' were at the Down Town Sewage Farm on 03 November 2007 and at the Airfield Water Treatment Site on 05 November 2007.

**Little Tern *Sterna albifrons***

Unlike previous visits, this species was the most numerous *Sterna* tern of the trip, the maximum count being 159 at Horseburgh Point on 01 November 2007. This species has been found breeding on Diego Garcia by Symens (1999) and McGowan (2008). No evidence of breeding was observed during this survey.

**Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi***

Two positive identifications were made of this species. Photographs of the two birds were passed around for comment by ornithological colleagues in the UK and it was agreed the birds were *saundersi*. It is suspected that due to lack of familiarity with the species and difficulty of identification, this species is being under recorded in BIOT by RNBWS.

**Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus***

This species was noted on four days with the maximum count being five on 05 November 2007. Historical records suggest this species is not abundant throughout the Chagos but has been found breeding by Baldwin (1975); Symens (1999) and McGowan (2008).

**White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus***

As with previous visits this species was regularly found at the two water treatment plants. The highest count was four on 31 October 2007. Data gathered over the past decade by RNBWS indicates this species is a regular northern hemisphere winter visitor to Diego Garcia (Carr, 1997, 2005).

**Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus***

This species is a common sight all around Diego Garcia. Of interest in November 2007 was the finding of isolated breeding pairs on mainland Diego Garcia away from Barton Point IBA. Up to ten pairs were breeding in trees in the Down Town area with other pairs breeding in trees near the marina and near the Down Town Sewage Farm. There was no evidence of synchronised breeding on East and Middle Island; two recently fledged chicks were found on West Island.

**Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris***

Not as common as the preceding species, Lesser Noddy can be found throughout Diego Garcia. A maximum count of 30 on 03 November 2007 was the highest recorded from the mainland. East Island held over 100 birds on 07 November 2007 but no evidence of breeding was found. Again, similar to Brown Noddy, this species has been found breeding in its thousands elsewhere in the Chagos (Baldwin, 1975; Symens, 1999; McGowan, 2008).

**Common White Tern *Gygis alba***

This is a common species all over Diego Garcia and nocturnal communal roosts are a nightly noisy feature of the Down Town area. This species has been recorded breeding throughout the year on all of the Chagos atolls (Bourne, 1971; Carr 1997; Symens, 1999). On this trip evidence of single pairs breeding on mainland Diego Garcia was found on 31 October 2007 and on East and Middle Island on 07 November 2007.

**Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus***

Two jaegers were observed by a single observer (Chris Patrick) doing a lone sea watch from the southern-most point on Diego Garcia between 09-1000 hrs on 08 November 2007. The observer is probably the most experienced sea watcher serving in the three Services and has a vast amount of hours under his belt observing birds at sea in all of the world's oceans – he knows his skuas. Chris made the following notes, repeated here *verbatim*:

“They were flying about 20 to 30 metres above the sea together with fairly lazy flight mainly gliding with some circling as they drifted northwest on the moderate breeze towards the southern tip of DG then up the west side. One bird appeared all dark apart from pale patches at the base of the primaries from below. Upper parts were dark although were not looked at in detail, so no pale patches on the wings were noted. No long feathers were noticed extending from the tail. The other bird was dark above with pale patches at the base of the primaries,



which were also seen on the under-wing. Below it was mainly fairly dark apart from a pale body and head with a slightly darker poorly defined band across the upper breast and a very obvious dark cap to the head. It was this last feature that initially made me think of Long-tailed Skua. The under-wing appeared to be slightly mottled and not uniformly dark. This bird had fairly short but noticeably pointed tail feathers extending from the centre of the tail. Both birds were the same build, lacking the deep-chested look of Pomarine Skua”.

Unfortunately the series of photographs Chris took are of two very distant birds (specks) and are not of sufficient quality to merit inclusion in this journal.

#### **Madagascar Turtle-dove *Nesoenas picturata***

This species remains a common sight throughout Diego Garcia. A flock of 24 were noted in the Downtown accommodation area on 04 November 2007 and 96 were counted throughout the same area two days later. Difficult to accurately assess, the total atoll population is thought to be in the region of 4-500 birds.

#### **Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata***

This is another familiar sight throughout the atoll. It is difficult to accurately gauge numbers because it occurs in all habitats. A conservative estimate of the total atoll population during the survey period was 1-200 birds.

#### **White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus***

These birds were one of the unexpected highlights of the trip and their conclusive identification is a testimony to Chris Patrick's tenacity and photographic ability. Whilst counting waders at Turtle Cove on 03 November 2007, Tony Tindale noted two distant birds that were obviously swifts *Apodidae*. These birds were feeding above trees and were over a kilometre away. The same area was visited the following day and the birds were still feeding in the same place but still no positive identification was made. On the 08 November 2007 after a Herculean effort Chris Patrick managed to secure photographs that conclusively proved these birds were White-throated Needletail. One of these pictures appears as Plate Fifteen in this journal. These two birds constitute the first record of this species for the Chagos.

#### **Common Swift *Apus apus***

Two (different) swifts were found hawking along the shoreline of Pointe Marianne on the 03 November 2007 by five of the expedition members. These birds were photographed but not immediately identified to species level, though it was obvious that two different species were present and both were *Apus* in shape and form. All expedition members located these two birds again at the same site on 08 November 2007 when further photographs were taken; one of these appears as Plate Sixteen in this journal. It was apparent in the field that one of the two birds was fork-tailed with white on the rump and the other was a uniformly dull brown coloured bird with a pale throat and slightly forked tail. Initial identification in the field was that this duller bird was Common Swift *Apus apus*. Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*, that is familiar to PC and CP, is the only likely confusion species in the Chagos. Pallid Swift was ruled out both in the field on the second viewing and after subsequent scrutiny of a series of photographs because this bird had 'slim' wings and a general lack of contrast in the under parts (that is apparent in *A. pallidus*). This is the first confirmed record of this species from BIOT.

**Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus***

This species proved less difficult to identify. Having *Apus apus* hawking with it proved helpful when gauging size, tail fork depth and shape. It was apparent in the field that the bird was equivalent in overall size to Common Swift, had a forked tail that appeared parallel when closed and a pale throat and white rump. Without too much debate it was discerned in the field that the bird was *Apus pacificus*, a species familiar to CP. A photograph of this bird appears at Plate Seventeen. This is the first record of this species for the Chagos.

**Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis***

This species is seen or heard throughout all habitats on the atoll and total numbers are difficult to assess. There are several small nocturnal communal roosts throughout Diego Garcia; the largest found was at the Fuel Point Reed Bed that held 40 on 01 November 2007. The atoll population is thought to be at least 500.

**Madagascar Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis***

This introduced exotic is another very familiar sight throughout all grass and wooded areas of the atoll. Again extremely difficult to accurately assess the total atoll population; it is thought that there were a minimum of 700-1000 birds present throughout the survey period.

**Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* ssp**

Following on from the first record of this species claimed by RNBWS in May 2005, a further two Yellow Wagtails were found during this survey. A single juvenile bird was a regular visitor to the Downtown Sewage Farm throughout the survey. This bird was photographed and appears at Plate Eighteen. A second individual flew southeast over Turtle Cove Pond calling on 08 November 2007. On driving the several kilometres back to the Downtown Sewage Farm after recording the Turtle Cove bird, the original bird was still there. It is assessed that due to the distance between the two points and the time between checking the two sites these were two separate birds.



**Plate One.** Four Garganey *Anas querquedula* in flight over the southern end of the runway on Diego Garcia on 05 November 2007. This photograph appears to show a male in eclipse (central pair, the lower bird), an adult female (front) and two juveniles.

*Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Two.** An adult Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* in flight photographed on 01 November 2007 on Diego Garcia. This bird was one of three present during the survey period and is the first record of this species from the Chagos.

*Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



**Plate Three.** An adult Indian Pond-heron *Ardeola grayii*, this bird was in addition to a juvenile that was also on Diego Garcia during 31 October - 08 November 2007. This is the first record of this species from the Chagos. *Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



**Plate Four.** An adult Great Egret *Casmerodius albus* that was present on Diego Garcia during 31 October – 08 November 2007. This bird constitutes the second Chagos record, the first bird also being found by RNBWS in 1996. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Five.** A Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, one of five to eight birds on Diego Garcia throughout 31 October – 08 November 2007. It is possible there is a small breeding population established. These birds are the first record of this species from the Chagos.

*Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Six.** A Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* photographed at the Landfill Site: Diego Garcia on 08 November 2007. There are two previous records of this species occurring in the Chagos both from Egmont recorded on a Joint Services Expedition in the early 1970's. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Seven.** Kentish Plover *Chundrius alexandria* (and a single Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*). This species has been recorded in very small numbers from both Diego Garcia and the outer atolls. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Eight.** Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* with a Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*. Snipe species have been recorded from Diego Garcia for at least 40 years but due to the difficulty surrounding identification no positive records have ever been claimed. This bird was eventually identified from a series of photographs taken by Chris Patrick. It is a first for the Chagos. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Nine.** Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*. A first for the Chagos. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Ten.** Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* is something of a rarity in the Chagos having only been seen previously in 1995 and on Diego Survey II in May 2005 as reported in *Sea Swallow*. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Eleven.** Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* has been recorded four times in the Chagos. The original record comes from Bruner in 1995, all other subsequent records coming from RNBWS personnel. This bird was extremely obliging, repeatedly flying around the observers giving its distinctive call. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.





Plate Twelve. Two Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* were found on the survey; these birds constitute the first records of this species from the Chagos.  
*Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



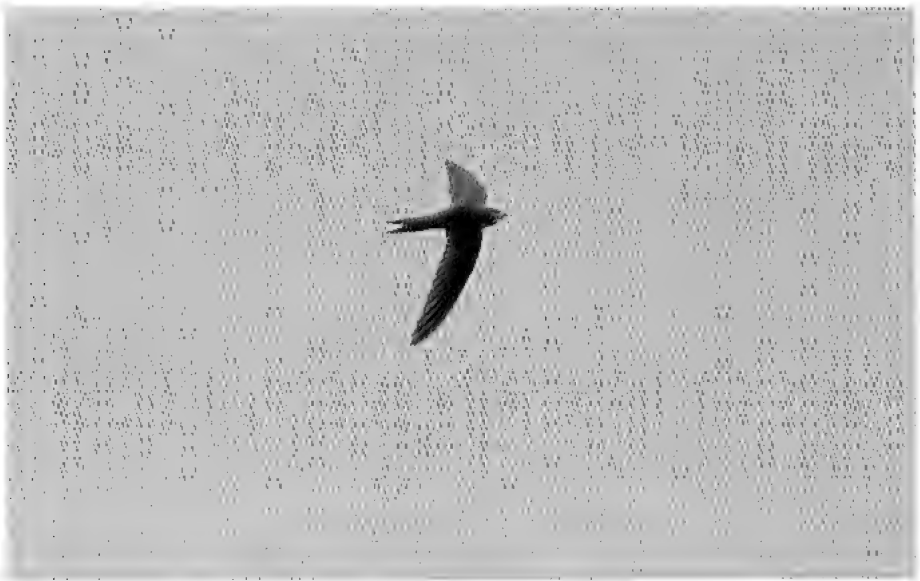
Plate Thirteen. Rufi *Philomachus pugmax* was found and photographed on 05 November 2007 and is a first for the Chagos. *Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



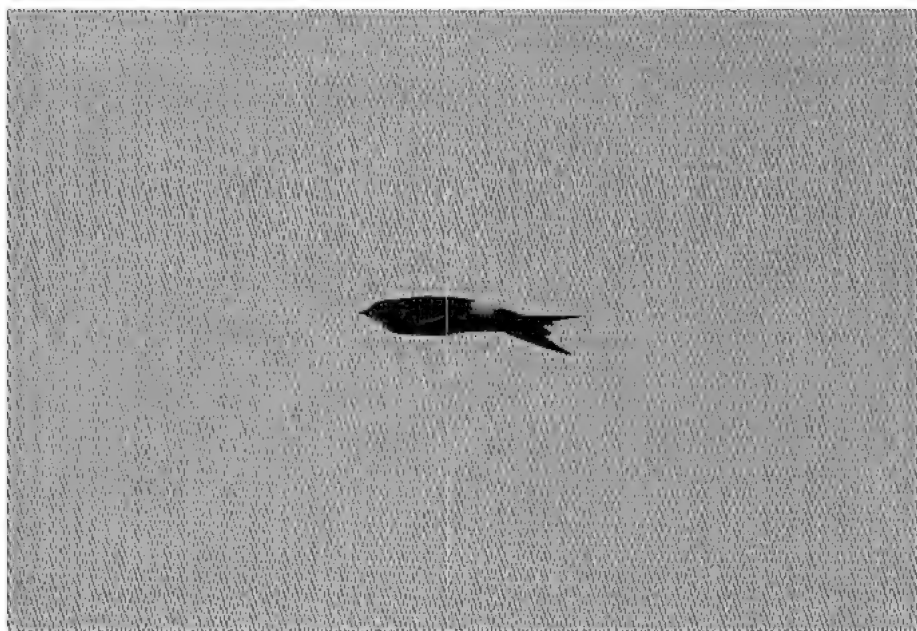
**Plate Fourteen.** Two Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* were present on Diego Garcia during 31 October - 08 November 2007; the diagnostic under wing pattern of this species shows clearly in this photograph. This species has only been recorded once before in the Chagos, on Egmont by a Joint Services Expedition in the early 1970's. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Fifteen.** White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* proved incredibly difficult to identify in the field as no diagnostic features could be seen due to light and distance. Once captured on photograph the identification was straightforward and this species was a first for the Chagos. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



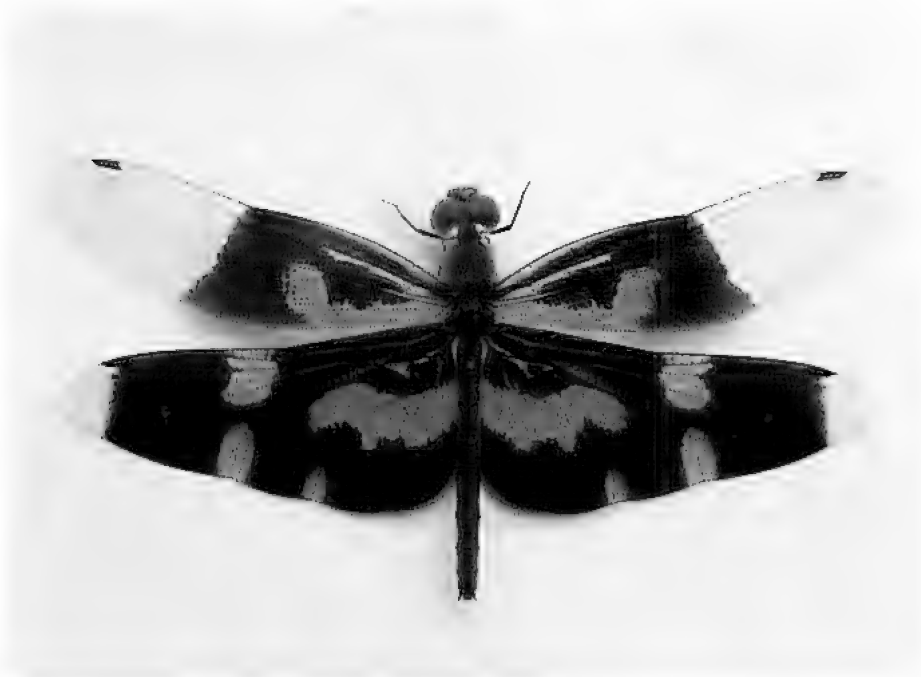
**Plate Sixteen.** Common Swift *Apus apus* was another species that proved tricky to identify in the field and confirmation of identification was assisted by a series of photographs. Swift species have been recorded from the Chagos before but have never been specifically identified, making this bird a first for the Chagos. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Seventeen.** This Fork-tailed (Pacific) Swift *Apus pacificus* was always found with the Common Swift *Apus apus* in Plate Sixteen. It was also a first for the Chagos. *Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



**Plate Eighteen.** These two photographs of the same Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* ssp are the second record for the Chagos and follow RNBWS finding the first in May 2005. There was a record of a second bird on Diego Garcia in November 2007 that is the third for the Chagos. *Photograph: Chris Patrick.*



**Plate Nineteen.** This female *Rhyothemis variegata* Linn. 1796 (Picturewing, Variegated Flutterer or Clearwing) was captured and photographed on Diego Garcia, a first for the Chagos. The identification has been confirmed by D Goodger of the British Natural History Museum where the specimen now resides. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Twenty.** *Calotes versicolor* (Oriental Garden Lizard or Bloodsucker) was first found on Diego Garcia in May 2001 and is now widespread around the inhabited area of the atoll. *Photograph:* Chris Patrick.



**Plate Twenty-One.** *Bufo marinus* (Cane or Giant Toad) is of South American origin and has appeared on Diego García seemingly in the last decade. It is widespread in areas of freshwater on Diego García. *Photograph:* Mark Cutts.



Plate Twenty-Two. The expedition members from L-R: Chris Patrick, Roger Dickey, Andrew Bray, Peter Carr, Mark Cutts and Tony Tindale. *Photograph: Chris Patrick*

**BUFF-BELLIED PIPIT *Anthus Rubescens Rubescens* ABOARD MV FRAM  
En Route From Westmann Islands, Iceland To Stornoway, Outer Hebrides,  
UK, 19th & 20th September 2007**



**Circumstances & Behaviour**

On the 19th September force 9-10 winds from the southwest (apparently associated with an easterly-moving Atlantic depression) prevented the ship from entering the harbour at Heimaey in the Westmann Islands, southwest Iceland. At 13.35 (all times quoted are local) the attempt was abandoned and we set off towards the Butt of Lewis on a course of 125°, approx. southeast.

Having already primed the passengers to report any birds on the ship to me, at 18.30 that evening I was called to the upper promenade deck to see a small bird. The co-ordinates were 62° 46.4' North, 018° 06.8' West, approx. 54 nautical miles south of the south coast of Iceland. The bird was a pipit of some kind and I watched it for 26 minutes as it walked over the plastic grating that covers the deck whilst looking for food. Subsequently I saw it find and eat an insect of some sort and it also came across a dead wasp, which was dismembered and devoured.

Initially the bird was wary of people and flew several times but I never heard it call at all. Having previously seen dozens of exhausted landbird migrants on ships the pipit seemed to fit right into that category. From being quite wary it soon became almost oblivious to people and its feathers also appeared very fluffed up. Its gait was also much slower and more deliberate than that of a 'normal' pipit. It spent most of its time on the promenade deck (7), which is immediately behind the forward observation lounge. On just one occasion I found it on the deck 5, below one of the lifeboats. The area it favoured on deck 7 is sheltered from the wind



on three sides by, respectively, high windows, a high bulkhead and a high glass screen. During the 20th it went to sleep several times on a sunken drain cover in the most sheltered corner.

The bird was watched for much of that day and was found freshly dead (eyes still wide open and glinting) at 16.45 in its favourite corner. The position was 59° 39.0' N, 009° 24.2' W, approx. 121 nm northwest of the Butt of Lewis. The corpse was picked up and upon examination the breastbone was found to be very prominent, an indication to me of a long flight, during which all the bird's fat reserves (plus body tissue too, probably) had been exhausted. When it arrived on the ship it had probably already gone beyond the point of no return. Photographs were taken of the bird on deck and also of the corpse.

## Description

The overall impression of the live bird was of a very brown individual, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis* size, heavily streaked below but hardly marked at all on the back or crown. The only white that could be seen was on the outer tail and there were no grey tones.

Length: 14cm, wing: 79mm, upper mandible: 9mm, tarsus: 18mm, hind claw: 9mm  
Crown, nape, mantle, back and uppertail coverts earth brown with darker-centred feathers on the crown and mantle - not really contrasting enough to be described as streaks.

Wings: background colour same as back. Two pale brown bars on the median and greater coverts and pale brown fringes to the tertials; longest tertial same length as the primaries.

Tail black with varying amounts of white on the three outer feathers. Outer: very narrow outer web white, broad inner web black at base and distally white. Second outer: large white area on the tip of the feather. Third outer: a very small white spot right at the tip of the feather. Underparts from breast to undertail coverts rich buff; well-defined throat patch slightly paler. Very dark streaking on the breast extended down the flanks in a wide band.

Face: generally plain. Narrow pale eye ring and lores, narrow, dark malar stripe and broader, pale moustachial extending to below the ear coverts; no eye or superciliary stripes.

Soft parts: bill slender; dark horn-coloured with paler base to lower mandible. Legs dark brown with darker, almost black, feet.

## Identification

Even though my gut feel for the bird as soon as I saw it was Buff-bellied, I don't see the species every day of the week and reference to the internet and the only book available was not very helpful. The bird appeared to be the same size as a Meadow Pipit but the National Geographic guide indicates that Buff-bellied should be longer (17cm). In addition, the NG plate was obviously not of the highest quality. And if the bird was a strange Meadow Pipit why was it in such an emaciated state only a few miles off the coast of Iceland, where the species is a widespread summer visitor?

A plate showing Buff-bellied Pipit plus accompanying text from Mullarney et al e-mailed to me later by Dick Filby in Norwich was much more helpful. However, the plate still showed a much paler bird than ours. Perhaps ours was a strongly-coloured immature? This might

also account for the smaller than described size (15-16cm in Mullarney). Shortly afterwards, when the ship reached Oban I was able to buy a copy of the book itself.

After mulling over the information at hand and having experience of all the European pipits except Blyth's (plus others on other continents too) I came to the conclusion that our bird was a Buff-bellied Pipit, *Anthus rubescens rubescens* rather than meadow on the basis of:

- Plumage details, especially the lack of any white (except tail)
- The emaciated state, indicating a probable long distance migrant
- The prevalent weather conditions.

However, with the limited information available, I am not able to age the bird so can only guess at an immature.

### **Fate of the corpse**

After it was found dead, the pipit was put straight into the fridge in my cabin for safe keeping. Attempts to meet a local birder in Stornoway to hand the corpse over on the 21st failed so the following day it was sent from Oban to DF in Norwich for examination. He has the idea of giving it eventually to the bird collection in the Castle Museum, Norwich.

### **References**

Mullarney et. al.(2001), *Bird Guide (Britain and Europe)*, Collins.  
National Geographic Society, *Field Guide to the Birds of North America 4th edition*.

### **Postscript**

A Buff-bellied Pipit was apparently discovered on Fair Isle on 23rd September.

Simon Cook  
Staff member & 'resident birder'  
MV Fram, en route from Iceland to Antarctica

## EXTRALIMITAL RECORDS OF AUSTRAL NEGRITO, *Lessonia Rufa*

During the course of the last ten years I have crossed the Southern Ocean in the South American sector on small cruise ships (as ornithologist) travelling to/from the Antarctic Peninsula on more than 100 occasions.

In the recent past I have seen two Austral Negritos at sea; the records are summarised below.

**2001:** for much of the daylight hours on the 21st November the *M.V. Clipper Adventurer* was over the Burdwood Bank (to the south of the Falkland Islands) en route from Westpoint Island, across the Drake Passage to Elephant Island. Immediately after breakfast I went up to the bridge of the ship to look out for cetaceans and seabirds. At 08.22 local time an Austral Negrito flew from the port side a few feet in front of the bridge windows and went off to starboard. Going out onto the starboard bridge wing, I saw that the bird was gaining height as it flew away from the ship. Its direction was checked against our course and the navigational chart. The negrito was heading directly for Isla de los Estados (off the southeastern corner of Tierra del Fuego), 128 nautical miles (nm) to the west-southwest. The position of the ship at the time was 54° 01' South, 59° 59' West, 88 nm south of the Falkland Islands.

Precise weather conditions were not recorded but both the sea and the wind were calm. The ship had spent the previous four days in the Falklands after arriving from the Antarctic Peninsula. The bird was not seen by anyone on the ship but could either have arrived on board during the previous night and left when I saw it, or had been attracted to the ship after dawn, circled us then headed away.

(It is also worth noting that at 15.01 on the same day a Pale-faced Sheathbill, *Chionis albus* was seen in flight; it circled the ship for 20 minutes before disappearing. The position of this sighting was at 55° 27' South, 59° 00' West, 174 nm south of the Falklands and 144 nm east-southeast of Isla de los Estados)

**2006:** on the 3rd March, whilst travelling in an east-northeasterly direction from the northern end of the Antarctic Peninsula towards the South Orkney Islands on the *M.V. Polar Star*, a small passerine was seen in flight close to the ship by, among others, Mark Lawton of Dublin, Colin Brooks of Winchester, Ken Taylor of Colchester and Dr. William Ackerly of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Co-ordinates and location are as follows: first seen at 17.00 hours local time (20.00 GMT), captured at 17.19; ship position 61° 49.9' South, 050° 32.7' West, being approx. 186 nautical miles west-southwest of Laurie Island, South Orkney Islands, ca. 140 nm east-southeast of Elephant Island, ca. 580 nm southeast of Isla de los Estados and ca. 640 nm south-southeast of the Falkland Islands. Visibility was poor throughout the day - murky, approx. 1 nautical mile visibility with foggy patches later in the day - and we were to the south of a low pressure area centred well to our north in the Drake Passage. The wind was westerly, 10 knots.

The bird landed briefly by the barbecue on deck 5, aft, before flying off astern. Returning up the wake, it landed and settled above an external door on deck 3, aft. John Gale, vet. & bird

artist (from near Exeter) identified it as a female/immature Austral Negrito and notified me. Photographs were taken before I picked up the unresisting bird (it appeared to be exhausted) and put it in a small cardboard box. A much larger one was soon found and half the lid was replaced with 1cm-square rubber mesh, to allow light in. JG subsequently successfully force-fed the bird on sugared water. It was then left with scrambled egg, cheese and finely chopped meat. A small bowl of water was also provided.

During the course of its containment the bird ate by itself. When the ship arrived at South Georgia various invertebrates were collected and given to it. The same was done when we arrived in the Falkland Islands: flies and maggots being obtained. Latterly, the bird was periodically let out of its box in JG's cabin and, after flying around briefly, it actively foraged on the floor. The live food was thrown down and the negrito fed avidly. It was very active and also called frequently, especially when JG returned to his cabin.

The negrito remained on the ship during our visits to the South Orkney Islands, South Georgia and the Falkland Islands. It was not released at the latter (where the species is a vagrant) due to the very windy, exposed nature of the areas we visited and the distance (normally against the prevailing wind) from South America. In the end the bird was released from the ship on 15th March at 07.05 local time (10.05 GMT) only minutes after docking in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. Suitable habitat was very close to the port area but it was decided not to risk trying to take the bird past port security and their sniffer dog in case of impoundment or worse.

In the half-light of dawn the negrito flew to a great height above the water, turned briefly back towards the ship and dropped to sea level - much to our consternation! However, it levelled out and headed off strongly towards the Peninsula Ushuaia, a short distance to the south. We were pleased to see it slip unseen past the local gulls. The release co-ordinates were 54° 48.6' South, 068° 17.7' West.

In terms of distance travelled by ship, the negrito was carried approximately 2,198 nautical miles/2,528 statute miles/4,070 kilometers over a period of 12 days.

According to the 'Complete Guide to Antarctic Wildlife' (Shirihai, 2002) this species has previously been recorded in the 'Antarctic coastal and/or immediate sea regions, including South Shetlands, South Orkneys and South Sandwich islands.' No other information on status is given and it is not possible from the book's bibliography to ascertain the source. However, this most recent occurrence is undoubtedly one of the southernmost ever for this diminutive, but migratory species.

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## PACIFIC ODYSSEY

From two small boats far from land on a choppy sea at the end of the optimal time of year, numerous pairs of eyes strained for our first glimpse of a recently rediscovered but critically endangered and virtually unknown seabird. Our long journey from port and chutning from the stern had already helped us to see a superb range of species, which included Caspian Tern, Fluttering Shearwater, Little Blue Penguin, White-fronted Tern, Common Diving-Petrel, Flesh-footed Shearwater, Australasian Gannet, Cook's Petrel, Black Petrel, Grey Noddy, Grey-faced Petrel, White-faced Storm-petrel, Fairy Prion, Pycroft's Petrel and Brown Skua.

Suddenly, from the other boat, came the long-awaited radio message - 'NEW ZEALAND STORMY IN THE WAKE!' However, the other boat was too far away for us to see the bird in question. It was a few minutes, which seemed like an eternity, before a mythical, black-streaked New Zealand Storm-petrel finally appeared close to us. During the course of the next fifty minutes there were up to three birds at a time in sight, providing us with some extremely exciting moments. Following quickly on were 4 Wilson's Storm-petrels and single Black-winged and Kermadec Petrels. In all the boats were out in the Hauraki Gulf of North Island, New Zealand, for 10.5 hours and we covered 108 nautical miles.

And all this excitement was just the beginning of the first-ever expedition cruise from Auckland, NZ to Kagoshima, Japan via Norfolk Island, New Caledonia and the Solomon and Caroline islands. The voyage proper started two days later in Auckland on a Russian, ice-strengthened, former scientific research vessel, The *Professor Khromov* (charter name *Spirit of Enderby*) has room for 48 passengers, of which I was one and she took exactly one month to reach Kagoshima. It was to be a month full of drama and excitement, which consisted for me of three main elements - seabirds, cetaceans and island endemics: at all of our stops special birding excursions had been arranged. Another aspect of this groundbreaking voyage was the hoped-for opportunity to add new species to my two special birding lists - birds seen from ships and boats and birds seen on ships and boats. Earlier opportunities had already added four new species to my 'seen from' list. The best were Fairy Tern, of which only 30-40 remain in the country and New Zealand Dotterel.

During the 3-day voyage to Norfolk Island a variety of weather and sea conditions was encountered - fog, cloud cover, drizzle, sunshine, wind, flat calm and conditions that on a crossing of the Drake passage to Antarctica from South America I would describe colourfully as a 'Drake Shake'. Crossing the Hauraki Gulf again on the 27th March 2007 enabled those not on the special pre-cruise pelagic trip to catch up with the storm-petrel, at least 4 of which were seen. New seabird species on that first day on the ship came in the form of Buller's, Flesh-footed and Little Shearwaters and single White-collared Petrel, Gibson's Albatross and Campbell Albatross. Day two was the rough one but that didn't stop the birding: with so many aficionados on board no-one dared to be inside for any longer than was absolutely necessary in case something important was missed. Before we arrived at Norfolk Island several species were added to the trip list - Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Long-tailed and Pomarine Skuas, White Tern, Red-tailed Tropicbird and our first and very distinctive Gould's Petrels.

Famous for its pine trees, Norfolk Island is a speck of rock in the middle of the ocean but it is a green and pleasant land, supporting as it does a small human population and a diverse selection of birds. Several kinds of seabird nest on the cliff faces and clifftops so there were lots of Black Noddies and 20 or more Red-tailed Tropicbirds around but we only saw a few Masked Boobies and one Great Frigatebird. Land and other birds were easier to find and during our time ashore Sacred Kingfisher, White-faced Heron, Grey Fantail, Silvereye, Whimbrel, Pacific Golden Plover and Welcome Swallow were picked out. The island is also home to several endemics/specialities and I was lucky enough to come across Norfolk Parakeet, Norfolk Gerygone, the recently split, superb Pacific Robin, Long-billed White-eye and the rarely seen White-chested White-eye.

But the sea was calling so we were soon on our way to New Caledonia. En route the temperature went from cool to warm with light winds and rain later. Once again there was an excellent selection of seabirds and no less than seven mouth-watering petrels - White-collared, Gould's, Black-winged, Collared, Kermadec and our first Tahiti and Providence. Sooty Tern, White-tailed Tropicbird, Brown Noddy, Red-footed Booby, Great Crested Tern, White or Black-bellied Storm-petrel and Sooty or Short-tailed Shearwater also appeared for the first time. Six Short-finned Pilot Whales and an unidentifiable dolphin were also observed. From the ship at the dock in Noumea I saw 2 Dark-brown Honeyeaters and a Glossy Swiftlet.

Having already been to the island before I only had three target species so I could afford to relax while everyone else worried about seeing as many endemics as possible. I was therefore very gratified to see New Caledonia Parakeet (excellent 'scope views of one bird), Southern Shrikebill (3 seen) and Melanesian Cuckoo-shrike (again, 3 seen). It rained for most of the time we spent in the forested reserve not far from town and for most people in the group the most wanted species was Kagu. This extraordinary bird, reminiscent of a night-heron, was ridiculously easy to see. Without even having to venture off the dirt road and onto the trails the birds came to us. They were so unconcerned about our presence that one or two wandered casually around and in between us. Those with cameras had to keep backing off as the subject approached more and more closely!

Despite the rain all the hoped-for species were gradually teased out of hiding. Many names began with New Caledonia: Myzomela, Imperial-Pigeon, Whistler, Friarbird and Crow, the latter being a tool-user. Other very attractive birds were also seen and they included Rainbow Lorikeet, Long-tailed Triller, Barred Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Yellow Robin, Streaked Fantail, Fan-tailed Gerygone, White-breasted Woodswallow, Red-throated Parrotfinch, Brown Goshawk and the bizarrely-named Cloven-feathered Dove. The most numerous species was Green-backed White-eye, with 30-40 logged. The following morning on Mount Koghi also found us 'rain-birding' so I limited myself to scanning the forest (when it was visible) from the shelter of a handy restaurant. Needless to say, there was very little activity but I did manage to add Striated Starling and Metallic Pigeon to my trip list.

Setting off from port at lunchtime, we were soon through the reef and heading through a choppy sea up the south-western side of New Caledonia. Silver Gulls and single Great Crested and Sooty Terns were around the lagoon whilst deeper water produced 400 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 200+ Gould's Petrels, 4 Tahiti Petrels and 2 Black-winged Petrels. The

next three days (4-6th April) were spent at sea and our progress was marked by more exciting encounters. On the morning of the first day the sea was choppy at first but later on it became much calmer. We were now off the northern end of New Caledonia. Another good selection of seabirds included 200+ Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 80+ Tahiti Petrels, 24 Masked Boobies and a few Lesser Frigatebirds. Just after lunch we got very close views of our first Sperm Whale, albeit a small one. It came within 100 metres of us, spouted continuously and was in 3,500 metres of water. At this point we were 10 miles west of the reef encircling Grand Lagoon North.

At 16.16 I finally saw my most wanted seabird in the world, White-throated or Polynesian Storm-petrel. Some 10 years previously, on a cruise from Chile to Tahiti, I had had the opportunity to handle a dead one found in the water at Sala y Gomez, near Easter Island. A few hours later, after nightfall, one landed on the ship and was released but I was not told about it so I failed to see a live bird - I had been wanting to see one ever since! The first of several individuals came very close to the ship and we all had excellent views of this large and impressive species. No sooner had the first one disappeared than a suspicious-looking slick was spotted so we changed course to investigate. The cause was a large dead whale and the stinking carcass and leaking body fluids had attracted 20 Tahiti Petrels, 10 Wilson's Storm-petrels and at least two more Polynesians. Also seen well was at least one big Tiger Shark, which took large chunks out of the rotting corpse.

The following day brought us another Polynesian Storm-petrel but it was a cetacean species that stole the show for me. I spotted a pod of about 10 medium-sized beaked whales breaking the surface just 100 metres off our port bow. They were on a converging course and soon crossed right in front of the ship. The largest was ca. 7m in length but there were smaller ones too. When first seen the prominent pale beaks broke the surface first and the heads, which had a pronounced, bulbous melon shapes, followed. The body colour was generally dark brown with some spotting and, possibly, some scarring. Having just spent a month in the Indian Ocean scanning for Longman's Beaked Whale, there was absolutely no doubt in my mind that I had now seen this recently-described species.

Our arrival at Rennell Island in the Solomons was celebrated with the sighting of 3 Australian Ibis from the ship. No time was wasted in getting ashore and it wasn't long before we began a leisurely walk along the rough dirt track through the forest that led, ultimately, to the airport. Now well into the tropics we had not rain to contend with but dripping bodies instead but that was a small price to pay for all the birds on offer. Even the supporting cast was impressive - an Osprey chick, Cardinal Myzomela, Uniform Swiftlet, a superb and very close (perched) Moustached Treeswift, a very distinctive form of Island Thrush (surely this "super-species" should have been split up by now?), Singing Parrot, Mackinlay's Cuckoo-Dove and Collared Kingfisher. Life birds are always the icing on the cake and I wasn't disappointed here either with 'Rennell' Shrikebill, Starling, Fantail and White-eye plus Silver-capped Fruit-Dove, Pacific Imperial Pigeon and Bare-eyed White-eye all being seen for the first time. However, by far the best bird was the diminutive, nuthatch-like (in habits) Finsch's Pygmy-Parrot. These tiny birds could take some time to spot but once found they usually stayed in view for some time as they clambered around the boughs of trees in search of food.

The next morning, on the way from the ship by zodiac, I saw two new species for my 'seen from' list, Welcome Swallow and Singing Starling. Once aboard the buses we headed out of Honiara on Guadalcanal up to nearby Mount Austin. From a hilltop a very muddy dirt road descended into logged forest, which gave us plenty of opportunities to see some of the local avifauna. Although only 18 species were recorded in my notebook there was plenty to be pleased about, not least the six lifers - Yellow-bibbed Lory, Brown-winged Starling, Ducorp's Cockatoo, Solomon Cuckoo-Shrike, Steel-blue Flycatcher and Buff-headed Coucal. Two distant but huge Blyth's Hornbills were a big surprise whilst much closer and more obliging birds included Yellow-faced Myna, Yellow-eyed and White-bellied Cuckoo-Shrikes, Red-knobbed Imperial-Pigeon and Eclectus Parrot. Sadly, we only heard a secretive Woodford's Rail as we were leaving to return to the ship.

At 06.00 the following morning we were again birding on Mt. Austin and the session began with good views of a Pied Goshawk. Many of the previous days' species were seen again but the additions were all lifers: Cardinal Lory, Claret-breasted Fruit-Dove, Midget Flowerpecker, White-winged Fantail and Black-and-white Monarch. The impressively Ultramarine Kingfisher caused panic and a lot of running down the track but an even bigger thrill was to come. No sooner had we set off for the ship than the buses slithered to a halt, we all decamped rapidly and binoculars were immediately brought to bear. The only Solomon Sea-Eagle of the trip gave fantastic views as it flew slowly around. From the ship later on a few birds were seen as well as 10-15 distant dolphins, 10-15 very close Short-finned Pilot Whales and ca. 20 Pygmy Killer Whales.

A fatal tsunami scotched plans for further landings in the Solomons so the next five days were spent at sea en route to the Caroline Islands. Our route took us to the west of the New Georgia Islands, along the south coast of Bougainville and to the west of Buka Island. Cetaceans included numerous unidentified beaked and rorqual whales and dolphins. Animals that I could put a name to included Risso's Dolphin, Spinner Dolphin, Bryde's Whale, Blainville's Beaked Whale, Dwarf Sperm Whale, Short-finned Pilot Whale, Rough-toothed Dolphin, and one of the bottlenose dolphin species. By now many of the tubenoses had left us, to be replaced by the likes of boobies, frigatebirds and noddies. However, at the end of our first full day at sea there was great excitement when another almost mythical seabird was spotted and identified - Heinroth's Shearwater. The following day, off south-western Bougainville, at least another 7 were seen, plus something even rarer, Beck's Petrel. Two of these birds were seen when we were 15 and 11 nm off the island of Buka in the late afternoon.

Once clear of the islands the number of birds fell considerably but Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Sooty and White Terns and White-tailed Tropicbirds were always good to see. There were also occasional northbound migrants too, such as Pomarine and Arctic Skuas and 4 Red-necked Phalaropes. On the morning of 15th April we saw, depending on one's view of the Little Shearwater complex, our first Tropical Shearwater. Later on, from the ship at Chuuk, several dozen Caroline Islands Swiftlets could be seen and the next morning, before our birding excursion, I saw 6 Micronesian Myzomelas from the ship. On Weno Island the group split into two to avoid congestion at the two main birding sites. Once more there were a number of specialities to be on the lookout for and we did well to find 'CI' White-eye, Reed Warbler and Ground-Dove plus Micronesian Starling (common), Purple-capped Fruit-Dove and Blue-faced



Parrotfinch. Our most haunting experience was walking through a tunnel hewn by slave-labour to a Japanese artillery piece that overlooked the anchorage below. Some of the crew from my ship snorkelled over one of the sunken Japanese ships, which was lost during a ferocious WW2 battle. From our ship later on I saw something familiar from back home and something a little more exotic - 5 Ruddy Turnstone plus 3 more Purple-capped Fruit-Doves.

Plans to stop in the (American) Mariana Islands were thwarted by red tape so we continued towards the Bonin Islands and Torishima, home of the fabled and almost extinct Short-tailed or Steller's Albatross. This decision meant another long sea passage - 7 days! However, having seen storm-petrels earlier in the trip we were now in range for northern species, the first of which was Matsudaira's. As time went by we saw more and more, plus other things like Brown Booby, Peregrine (120 nm from land), Bulwer's Petrel, Bannerman's Shearwater, a migrating Little Whimbrel that flew repeatedly around the ship, our first Streaked Shearwater, a South Polar Skua being harried by Bonin Petrels, False Killer Whales and a Whale Shark beside the ship.

On the 22nd April we were to the south and west of the Bonin Islands and there were many birds around us. Amongst them was an exhausted Barn Swallow that allowed us to hand-feed it captured flies for several days before, reinvigorated, it left us. Hundreds of Bonin Petrels, shearwaters and storm-petrels included 2 Leach's and 2 possible Swinhoe's Storm-petrels as well as my last member of this widespread family - Tristram's Storm-petrel. These birds could only be picked out with any degree of certainty from the Matsudaira's at close range but luckily many were obliging. Homing in on a Black-footed Albatross way back in the wake won me a bottle of bubbly and another was seen before the day was out.

The following day was Torishima day. It started out overcast and calm but quickly changed to stormy and wet. Nevertheless, we had another action-packed day, with hundreds of familiar seabirds around the ship. The day began for me at 04.50 with the first of many Black-footed Albatrosses and the last species in my notebook that day was Steller's Albatross, several of which were seen. They were not nearly as curious as the black-footed and preferred to come for a look then continue on their way. Visibility was by now so poor that the island was just a vague shape in the distance. Once everyone was happy that they had seen enough we set course for Kagoshima, three days away.

Time again passed quickly because there was still plenty to see. Cetaceans continued to appear - Pantropical Spotted Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, False Killer Whale and another close shark - Scalloped Hammerhead. Seabirds began to reduce in number but compensation came in the form of spring migrants, some of which landed on the ship. The first in this category was a Black-faced Bunting and this was followed by a Siberian Rubythroat, a Pacific Golden Plover, several Barn Swallows, 2 Striated Herons and 1 Cattle Egret. Birds seen from the ship were varied too: 1 Red-rumped Swallow, 3 Chestnut-checked Starlings flying away from the ship (I saw one return shortly afterwards and land on an aerial), 2 Little Egrets, 1 Great White Egret, several more Cattle Egrets, a Terek Sandpiper and, among two flocks of unidentifiable passerines, 2 Blue-and-white Flycatchers. On the 27th April we docked in Kagoshima and I added the final species to my 'seen from' list - Spot-billed Duck, Fan-tailed Warbler and Grey Starling.

Rather than fly straight home several of us stayed on in Japan, in the Kagoshima area. Even at the airport, where the main group was being dropped off, there were lifers to be seen in the shape of Green Pheasant, Brown-eared Bulbul and Japanese Wagtail. A drive to Lighthouse Point at Kadogawa produced several more exciting species, such as Oriental Greenfinch, Olive-backed Pipit and Rufous Turtle Dove. Unfortunately, we only got to hear Japanese Bush-Warblers and a Bamboo Partridge. At the point itself we found ourselves on a footpath that meandered through woods to a high vantage point. In addition to 2 Blue Rockthrushes, four birds with the 'Japanese' moniker were seen - White-eye, Wood Pigeon, Pygmy-Woodpecker (excellent views of three) and one of the bush-warblers at last.

The main reason for staying on in Japan was to look for the scarce (Japanese) Crested Murrelet and from the end of the trail four were spotted through a telescope. They were at extreme range but even so the head plumes could be clearly seen. The next morning we chartered a small boat and we got so close to more of these stunning little birds that we had to go astern. This really was the cherry on the icing on the cake! But we weren't quite finished yet. From Kadogawa we retraced our route and the best birds that we saw on the journey were Siberian Meadow Bunting and Chestnut-eared Bunting. Our destination for the next two days was an old volcano at Miike, the lower slopes of which were extensively forested. Although still a little too early for the majority of the summer visitors there was still plenty on and amongst the trees to excite us.

It was here at Miike, then, that my phenomenally successful trip finally came to an end. The last few species to be added to the trip list were Oriental Cuckoo, Large-billed Crow, Ruddy Kingfisher, Bull-headed Shrike, White-backed Woodpecker and the stunning Narcissus Flycatcher. Japan was a country that I had not visited before so the forest held a few more life birds too - Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Short-tailed Bush-Warbler and a Copper Pheasant at close range. Unfortunately, it was not a male!

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## SPRING MIGRATION OF ROSS'S GULL *Rhodostethia rosea* IN THE NW PACIFIC AND BERING SEA

On May 11th 2007, four of us were cruising the NW Pacific aboard MIS Statendam. At about 13.30 hrs and approximate position 53° 02' N 164° 16' E, someway S of the Commander Islands, A.Quinn was sea watching from the foredeck when 4 adult and 2 first summer Ross's Gulls (*Rhodostethia rosea*) flew into the field of view of his telescope. The underparts of all were incredibly pink and combined with the jizz and other features they were unmistakable. Nevertheless this was not at all an expected species and when B.E.Cooper, G.Mackiernan and P.R.Colston returned from lunch the news was received with a certain amount of incredulity. About three hours later however, another adult, this time moving N as against the more easterly track of the earlier birds, cut some way in front of the bows and was seen by all. It seemed to land and was thought by P.R.C to perhaps have joined some others on the sea.

The following day, still May 11th as we had crossed the date line, three further adults, also moving N, were seen at position 53° 15' N 175° 00' E, north-east of Attu in the Aleutian Islands. These observations left us in little doubt that we were witness to a small northward migration of the species from a wintering area in the NW Pacific or perhaps the Sea of Okhotsk. Other seabirds migrating at the time were c250 Long-tailed Skuas (*Stercorarius longicaudus*), c200 Short-tailed Shearwaters (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) and a few Kittiwakes (*Rissa tridactyla/brevirostris*) of both species. Seventy Laysan Albatross (*Phoebastria immutabilis*), 250 Mottled Petrels (*Pterodroma inexpectata*) and 1500 Fork-tailed Petrels (*Oceanodroma furcata*) were within their expected wintering/summering range.

Our journey began in Osaka, Japan (passing the Kuril Islands and Kamchatchka Peninsula) and finished in Vancouver, having tracked north of most of the Aleutians, through the Bering Sea, to the Alaskan Peninsula. These were our only encounters with Ross's Gulls. Apart from near glaciers we encountered no sea ice on our voyage.

Olsen and Larsson (Gulls of Europe Asia and North America, 2003) state wintering areas in the vicinity as the Bering and Okhotsk Seas and that in excess of 100 were at N Hokkaido in 2001. They also state that spring migration is poorly known.

The recently published Birds of the Aleutians (Gibson and Byrd 2007) gives four single records for the Aleutians on Attu, Alaid, Shemya and Adak.

P.R.Colston, B.E.Cooper,  
G. Mackiernan, A.Quinn.

## BOOK REVIEW

David Snow (2008). *Birds in our Lives*. 233 pages (size A5), including numerous photographs and the author's drawings and paintings, some in colour.

Ebor Press, Sessions of York, Huntington Road, YORK YO31 9HS.

ISBN 978-1-85072-381-3 £12.99 + £2.50 UK p&p. / £3.80 (overseas surface mail).

Members of RNBWS will find this autobiography of special interest. In a partnership with his wife, Barbara, spanning nearly 50 years, their travels took them to Trinidad (1956-61), Galapagos (1963-64), and many other places of interest to seafarers, and his early years include an account of David's wartime experience as an RNVR officer (1943-46). Aboard HMS *Starling*, under the leadership of Captain Walker, he saw successful actions against U-boats, in the Battle of the Atlantic.

Many will be familiar with David and Barbara's acclaimed papers published in *Ibis* and other international journals, on the breeding activities of spectacular and little known cotingas, oilbirds and hummingbirds; and other previously unknown species in Trinidad, South and Central America, and Galapagos.

But this story covers the practical and domestic experiences which lay behind these observations, and David's early years reveal a fascinating insight into how his interests developed, as he became the eminent and internationally respected ornithologist. The impetus to write this book came from Barbara, who sadly died before the final stages of its completion, and was initially intended purely as a record for their grandchildren.

Although he always had a passionate interest in birds, David was equally active in drawing and watercolour painting of flowers and other subjects, until his late twenties. As a scholar at Eton College (1938-43) he studied classics, and won a classical scholarship to New College Oxford, but was already beginning to turn to hopes of a career in the natural sciences. First he had to do his spell of national service and, to avoid a threat of a desk-job ashore, he joined the Royal Navy, where he made the most of visits to overseas places of birding interest.

After the war, and a university degree at Oxford, he pursued an active career in ornithology, at the Edward Grey Institute (EGI) in Oxford, from where he visited North Africa, the Pyrenees and other places of relevance to bird migration. His marriage to Barbara took place in Trinidad, in 1958, where he had established a research station. Together they were largely responsible for influencing the setting up of the nearby Asa Wright Nature Centre, which is now an essential stopping point for all birding visitors to the island.

Readers will find of special interest David's activities as the first Director of the Charles Darwin Research Station in the Galapagos, from where he came to know Darwin's great grandson, Captain Sir Thomas Barlow Bart, DSC RN, who had become secretary of the Charles Darwin Foundation; a founder member of RNBWS, he was later to become Vice-Chairman (1968-2004). Despite his administrative responsibilities, and the addition of a young son, David and Barbara made time to study the seabirds and discover the previously unknown nesting cycles of Swallow-tailed Gull, Lava Gull and Flightless Cormorant. And, on return to the UK in

1964, David was summoned to Buckingham Palace to brief the Duke of Edinburgh on which islands he should visit on a trip he was planning, in HMV Britannia.

Subsequent achievements in a busy life, include Research Director of the rapidly expanding British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), including editor of the quarterly journal *Bird Study*, and the transfer of the bird collection at the British Museum (Natural History) to Tring. David is also known to many as Editor of the BOU's *Ibis*, and the British Ornithologists' Club (BOC), *Bulletin BOC*.

This delightful book is written for anyone interested in birds and contains new insights into the lives of not only exotic species, about which most of us can only dream, but also of common garden visitors to our bird tables such as tits, thrushes and Dunnocks.

I can strongly recommend this autobiography, which is highly readable and extremely good value. Copies are obtainable direct from the publisher.

Michael Casement

## OBITUARY

### Captain Peter Chilman Merchant Navy



We are sad to report that Captain Peter Chilman Merchant Navy, for many years a Vice Chairman of the RNBWS passed away after a short illness in April this year.



Peter Chilman was born in York in 1927. He was educated at St Peter's School, York and Gordonstoun, before going on to the training ship HMS CONWAY. He joined the Merchant Navy in 1944 and was supposed to sail with the Anglo Saxon Petroleum Company, but the vagaries of wartime manning meant that he actually made his first trip as an apprentice with Shell, the beginning of a professional relationship that lasted 40 years. Immediately after the war he spent several years in Shell's Far East Fleet, trading between Singapore, the then Dutch East Indies and Australia. During this period he acquired a number of unusual pets including a spider monkey and a moosang (a kind of jungle cat). He served in all types of tankers and, in the latter stages of his career, in bulk coal carriers. He was a prolific submitter of bird records to RNBWS: he submitted 1719 individual records over the period 1957-1983 from 26 different Tankers.

But apart from contributing to the 'Sea Swallow', he was for many years a reviewer of bird reports for the 'Marine Observer'. He retired in 1985 and in addition to ornithology

pursued a wide range of other interests, notably archeology (he was an enthusiastic volunteer on several 'digs' with the York Archeological Trust) and local history. He spent over 2 years acting as a full time carer for his wife, who died in 2005.

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## INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

Interested persons are invited to submit contributions for *Sea Swallow*; authors do not need to be RNBWS members. Material may take the form of papers, notes, progress reports, letters or reviews. The style used in *Sea Swallow* should be followed, with the standard abbreviations, nomenclature and use of references. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Manuscripts should be typed in double spacing, together with figures and diagrams. Accompanying photographs are welcome. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition must reach the Editor by 30 June.